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THE CRESSET

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whatever is **TRUE**

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whatever is **RIGHT**

whatever is **PURE**

whatever is **LOVELY**

whatever is **ADMIRABLE**

if anything is excellent or praiseworthy
—think about such things.

*Philippians 4:8*
IN LUCE TUA
In Thy Light

A House of Conversations

Growing up on Long Island in the 1950s and ’60s, Margaret and Monica O’Gara learned the importance of faith from their parents. James and Joan O’Gara modeled a strong commitment to the church—a commitment that included regular devotional practices, concern for the poor, openness to learning, and a balance between (as the sisters recalled decades later) “a healthy lay criticism of the official church” and “respect for our teachers and pastors.” That commitment fueled the conversations and activities of the O’Gara family, just as their conversations and activities deepened that commitment.

This commitment to the church also inevitably played out within a larger community. “We remember wearing our best dresses and patent-leather shoes, serving appetizers to the crowd of visiting grownups in the living room,” the sisters wrote in a 2004 article in Commonweal, the Catholic magazine where their father served as editor for seventeen years (and managing editor for fifteen years before that).1 The visitors included writers and social justice activists and publishers and priests, all eager to discuss crucial topics in the years immediately before and after—and during—the Second Vatican Council.

“Our house was a house of conversations,” the sisters wrote. “Always the talk was good, and always the same kind of questions: What should the church do? What should the United States do?”

With that kind of upbringing, with those kinds of conversations happening in the living room, perhaps it’s no surprise that Margaret O’Gara pursued graduate studies in theology. She ultimately landed a job at the University of St. Michael’s College in Toronto, where she built a reputation as a scholar of ecumenical theology and a champion for dialogue between the churches. She participated in official ecumenical dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and Lutherans, Anglicans, Disciples of Christ, and Evangelicals, as well as in Bridgefolk, an organization for dialogue between Catholics and Mennonites.

What I like so much about Margaret O’Gara’s story is how her growing-up years connect to her vocation as a theologian. Britannica.com tells us the word ecumenism comes from classical Greek: oikos, meaning a “house,” “family,” “people,” or “nation”; oikoumenē, “the whole inhabited world”; and oikoumenikos, “open to or participating in the whole world.” O’Gara’s story shows how conversations at home can lead to conversations with people far beyond one’s front door—conversations with the potential for healing and overcoming division.

MARGARET O’GARA DIED IN 2012, FAR too soon. Her legacy lives on in her scholarship and in places such as the Margaret O’Gara Ecumenical Dialogue Collection, an online resource and repository for the work of Canadian bilateral ecumenical dialogues. Recently, a particular aspect of her work also found its way into presentations and conversations at the annual National Conference of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts. On October 12-14, 2018, faculty and administrators from church-related colleges and universities gathered at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, to consider the theme “Robust and Receptive Ecumenism” and what it means for their institutions. In her talk, “The Accidental Ecumenist,” which has been adapted as an essay in this issue, Lisa DeBoer referenced O’Gara’s work on ecumenism as gift exchange. Conference speaker Steven R. Harmon also picks up that gift exchange thread in his essay, “Receptive Ecumenism and the Reconstruction of Christian Identity in Christian Education.”

The themes of conversation and gifts surface throughout this issue, even when they aren’t connected to ecumenism. Be sure to check out John Ruff’s essay, “Betty LaDuke’s Great Gifts,” and Hilary Yancey’s column, “My Son Speaks in Hymns.” Like O’Gara, Yancey reminds us that when we engage with people who encounter the risen Christ differently than we do, there are astonishing gifts to be had. Opportunities may be closer than you think.


—HGG

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Anne Tyler's novel, The Accidental Tourist, chronicles a year in the life of Macon Leary. Leary is the author of a series of travel guides for businessmen whose idea of the best sort of trip would involve never leaving home. Leary's guides seek to avoid the discommodulation of travel by maximizing familiarity and minimizing friction. Where can one find a solid bacon, egg, and toast breakfast? Which hotels are comfortably consistent from visit to visit, from city to city? How should one pack and navigate so as to avoid unnecessary contact with unpredictable locals? As the narrator summarizes: "Other travelers hoped to discover distinctive local wines; Macon's readers searched for pasteurized and homogenized milk."

Of course, by the end of the novel, despite his best cautions, Leary's travels—literal and metaphorical—have transformed him. Unavoidable frictions, discomforting inconsistencies, and most dramatically, unruly interactions with the locals have expanded his vision, widened his imagination, and opened in him a vein of sympathy strong enough to overcome his jealously guarded boundaries. Macon by no means becomes a different person, but he is most definitely changed.

Over the years that I was researching and writing The Visual Arts in the Worshiping Church, I recognized it was different than my previous research projects. I knew that I was being pushed, pulled, and tested as a person more than had been the case before, but until recently I'd not consciously considered the meaning of those experiences. It turns out those experiences have provided me with insights and rewards I would not have found on a more familiar path. They also illustrate some of the possible dynamics of receptive ecumenism as they might play out within the varied and particular Christian college and university settings.

Becoming an Accidental Ecumenist

At the outset of my research for The Visual Arts in the Worshiping Church, I did not see any need to venture beyond "home" in order to pursue my questions. That is to say, I wasn't intending to venture beyond Protestant congregations. Wasn't the distance between an art-committed congregation like Mars Hill in Grandville, Michigan—a stand-alone, evangelical quasi-megachurch led at that time by Rob Bell—and an art-committed congregation like St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal in San Francisco—an intentionally experimental congregation that would press the liturgical limits of the Episcopal Church's new Book of Common Prayer?—wasn't that distance enough? It seemed


to me there was enough historical, confessional, and theological variety among Protestant congregations to adequately explore my initial hypothesis. I had embarked on this project hypothesizing that theological identity and confessional commitment inflected how the visual arts are used and received in congregational settings. I was inspired by Richard Hughes's and William Adrian's book, *Models of Christian Higher Education*. Reading that book early in my academic career proved very formative for me, helping me appreciate the internal logic of different Christian educational visions shaped by varied theological and confessional commitments. Although they are all within the Protestant tradition, Methodists, Anabaptists, Lutherans, and Calvinists will, as a consequence of their confessional and theological differences, build different kinds of colleges—each with its own kind of integrity. So, I transposed Hughes and Adrian's method from *Models of Christian Higher Education* to an inquiry into how churches use the arts—hoping to discover and map a parallel world of confessionally informative difference.

Over the course of three years, I built up a list of a few hundred contacts in more than twenty-five denominations and church associations who could tell me what was going on with the visual arts in their bailiwicks. But after much surveying, conversing, researching, and reading, it became clear my hypothesis was not panning out. Among my sample, at least, confessional identity was the least determinative factor in what might be happening in any art-committed Protestant congregation. Get folks from a stand-alone, internet-savvy evangelical church like Mars Hill to explain their reasons for their engagement with art, and it turns out they sound just like the folks from icon-commissioning St. Gregory of Nyssa. Ecclesially and confessionally, not to mention politically and culturally, these congregations are profoundly different. Yet I found the same theological and doctrinal language in circulation to justify and explain their engagement with art. I heard talk about the doctrine of creation; talk about human creativity as a reflection of the *imago dei*. I heard about culture and witness. I heard about their ministry to their local communities. Where I expected to find confessionally informed difference, I found a confusing uniformity. On top of that, it also became clear that there I was not finding any stable patterns in the kinds of artistic activity that might characterize any given confessional community. A United Methodist church might have very similar programming to Mars Hill; Presbyterian churches might be commissioning and using icons. Church-based art galleries are ubiquitous—though pressed to a number of different ends. This was not going well at all.

Gradually, two new and more interesting questions came into focus. There was more in common across art-committed Protestant congregations than I'd imagined. But what, exactly, did they have in common? Second, there remained, nonetheless, clear and significant differences in practice for which I needed to give account. If those differences were not coming from theological commitments or confessional identity, where were they coming from?

Where I expected to find confessionally informed difference, I found a confusing uniformity. This was not going well at all.

That's when I realized I needed to leave "home." If I wanted answers to these new questions, I needed more context. To consider the significance of the similarity I'd discovered in Protestant environments, I needed to test it against how Catholic and Orthodox Christians talked about artistic activity in their congregations. And in order to account for the wide range of art on the ground in art-committed Protestant congregations, I needed to shift my focus from confessional and theological rationales to the assumptions, patterns, practices, and structures that resulted in actual works of art. This was where my accidental ecumenism began.

**The View from There**

The best sort of research takes researchers to unexpected places. These unexpected places are often challenging—maybe energizing and inspiring, or
daunting, or frustrating. Most of the time, this research remains purely academic. Sometimes, though, the emerging argument can start making demands on one's character. It can do something to you as a scholar, a person, a Christian.

In a nutshell, here's what I learned: what happens with the arts in Protestant settings has almost everything to do with the norms and values of our larger North American art system.

Having stumbled my way toward a new set of questions that forced me outside my initial parochial confines, what could I see now that I hadn't seen before? What accounted for the striking similarities in how Protestants talked about the arts in congregational life, even as the kinds of artistic objects and activities they might support ranged from websites to icons, from summer art camps to juried exhibitions, from planning elaborate installations in support of a sermon series to collecting museum-quality works of art?

In a nutshell, here's what I learned: what happens with the arts in Protestant settings has virtually nothing to do with theological or confessional commitments. What happens with the arts in Protestant settings has almost everything to do with the norms and values of our larger North American art system. This discovery accounts for the similar rationales I heard for sustained involvement in the arts. Everyone was speaking the same "art system" dialect, lightly baptized with a sprinkling of doctrinal or biblical language: for instance, as God is clearly creative, and as we are made in the image of God...we too are creative and that gift should be received by the church. Also: the art world at large values originality, individuality, and expression and, in the guise of honoring the doctrine of creation and the imago dei, so do Protestant congregations.

Note that the creation/imago dei rationale for the arts gives permission. It does not give direction or destination. This insight helped unlock my second question—how to explain the diversity of objects, activities, and practices on the ground. That too, it turns out, has its roots in various parts of our North American art system: what happens in a Protestant congregation depends entirely on who establishes the program. Is it a K-12 art educator who values participation? A graphic designer who values elegant clarity? An architect who values the integrity of the worship environment? Someone with an MFA perhaps, who values imagery that is allusive, open-ended, and often challenging?
The diversity on the ground in Protestant congregations is drawn entirely from the diversity of art worlds that make up our North American art system. Educators, designers, architects, and MFAs, while all part of our larger North American art system, nonetheless inhabit different worlds within that system. While they share some fundamental commitments (individuality, originality, expression), they inflect them differently. They in turn, import the assumptions, standards, and practices of their guilds (often without critical reflection) directly into their churches. Not incidentally, this accounts for much of the difficulty that art initiatives can encounter—when a program envisioned by an MFA runs up against the sensibilities of a K-12 teacher, or the vision of an architect runs up against the assumptions of the graphic designer, there is likely to be trouble. These gifted and dedicated folks are left to hash things out on their own, with very few institutional guidelines or structures to help direct the outcome.

The dominance of art-system assumptions is so ingrained in Protestant practice that it is all but invisible without a foil—in this case, the foil of Orthodox and Catholic practice. Orthodox and Catholic congregations may initially use similar doctrinal language (creation, incarnation, sacramentality) to justify their use of visual art, but very soon, the language becomes concretely ecclesial: it's what church tradition upholds or even demands; art supports and interprets the action of the liturgy; art is a powerful mnemonic for the Christian story. Art teaches and encourages believers. In all these formulations, art is clearly licit, but, in the context of worship and congregational life, it is subservient to the church's larger purposes. For Orthodox and Catholics, art, when it enters the church, can never become an end in itself.

The first half of my project, then, involved discerning and describing the assumptions, practices, and patterns that guide artistic activity in Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant congregations. Subsequently, a series of six smaller, though no less interesting, questions emerged. I'll touch on just two here: first, the question of how using the arts tends to underscore the universal or local character of the church; second, how the arts mediate the relationship between corporate worship and individual devotion.

The need to understand one's church as both universal and local is, as Gordon Lathrop calls it, an "essential tension." The Church is always local: "it has no other existence....it is always a local gathering of people with their leaders, around the Scriptures and the sacraments, knowing Christ risen and here" (emphasis is Lathrop's). Yet the Church is also always universal, "in communion with all the churches of Christ, in every time and every place, and that what it celebrates is a Gospel which has universal significance...." Though all Christians acknowledge this truth in theory, in reality, our everyday, operative ecclesiologies tend to foreground one of these identities, rendering the other as background.

Orthodox icons represent the strongest example of using art to underscore the universality of

the church. Though there are small variations, the visual vocabulary of icons has remained remarkably stable throughout the centuries because the “look” of the church is a reflection of heaven. It is independent of historical era or geographic region. As one Orthodox scholar put it, “How can you remodel the heavenly city?”

We should notice what the arts are doing, what they are reinforcing and underscoring in congregational life. Then we should pause to consider if that’s what we want them to do. Or if that’s all that we want them to do.

In the Catholic Church, post-Vatican II practice allows for more stylistic variation but supports the work of the arts in congregational life through a clear set of structures and procedures. These are found in Environment and Art in Catholic Worship (1978) and Built of Living Stones (2000), two documents published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and through diocesan liturgical committees, as well as in the growing profession of liturgical consulting. These structures and processes subordinate art to the purposes of the liturgy—which is understood to be universal. There’s ample room for creativity, but much less for the kind of individual self-expression assumed as a norm in our wider art system. The integrity and universality of liturgical action is paramount; any art that interferes or competes with it is inappropriate for church use.

In most Protestant settings, by way of contrast, little explicit thought goes into how the arts might underscore the universality of the church. The visual arts, as they show up in Protestant settings, tend to represent the congregation, or a group in the congregation, or an element of the local community, or an aspect of ministry. The arts underscore the concerns and identity of the local congregation.

My argument here is not that some of these practices are more legitimate than others. It’s simply that we might want to become more self-aware. We should notice what the arts are doing, what they are reinforcing and underscoring in congregational life. Then we should pause to consider if that’s what we want them to do. Or if that’s all that we want them to do. That goes for Orthodox and Catholics, too. There are consequences for the choices that we all make. For the most part, though, we are oblivious to the reality that we are making choices in the first place, and that’s a situation we might want to correct.

The second question—that of corporate worship and private devotion—turned out to be one of the most interesting themes to emerge from my accidental ecumenism. Most of us engage regularly in individual or family devotional practices. I’d never before, however, had cause to note the degree to which the visual arts mediate the relationship between private devotion and corporate worship (or not, or problematically so, in the case of some Protestants). Generally speaking, for Orthodox and Catholics, the best sort of individual devotion feels like, looks like, sounds like, and moves like Sunday worship. Images, prayers, even physical actions are often drawn from the Sunday liturgy. For many Protestants, it’s the other way around: the most meaningful public worship looks like, feels like, and works like the best private devotional experience. This is often mediated by singing.

This issue caught my attention because my institution, Westmont College, is not affiliated with any denomination or association of churches. We are generically Protestant, multi-

4 Some “westernized” Russian icons of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries being the exceptions that prove the rule, an exception generally now labeled deviant.

6 Exceptions to this do exist, and those are the congregations who’ve taken their cues from the Catholic Church, via the ecumenical movement. They’ve typically embraced art as a companion to the Revised Common Lectionary and observation of the liturgical year. But among art-committed Protestant congregations, this is a minority report.
denominational, with a handful of Orthodox and a growing number of Catholic students, currently about ten percent of our student body. One of our challenges as an independent Christian college is to help students understand the Church, both theologically and institutionally, and then commit to it as more than something that meets their devotional needs. But if our shared worship on campus is assumed to be, and orchestrated to feel like, look like, sound like, and position us as individual devotees engaged in what I call "simultaneous, individual, private devotion," then I'd really like us to take a page from the Vatican II playbook and start thinking of our shared worship as a corporate, communal activity that demands our "full, conscious, and active, participation." For Catholics, the key words in that iconic phrase might be "full, conscious, and active." For some Protestants, however, I think the key word is "participation," a joyous embrace of the reality that when we join together in worship, we are more than the sum of our parts, we are more than a collection of individuals. We are being made into a people, into a communion, into the witness bearing body of Christ.

There's much more I could say about the content of the project, but this gives you some sense for the kinds of questions and learning that resulted as a consequence of my accidental ecumenism. I'd like to turn now to a less conventional discussion: What it felt like to undertake this journey.

As I mentioned, this project turned out to be pushy. I'd never before pursued a research project that leveled serious challenges to who I thought I was and how I thought I should behave. I recognized this as it was happening—most of us are self-aware enough to understand when we are holding up (or not) under what we feel to be trying circumstances. In retrospect, I can see that my accidental ecumenism wasn't only for the benefit of the research. It also benefitted me as a person, exposing for examination aspects of my character that are not always in play in my academic life. Three stories in particular illustrate this. And although I'm not an expert in ecumenical dialogue, they do raise relevant questions that I think might be a place to start.

Story One: Encountering Identity Threat

Part of my research involved interviews. I talked with artists, clergy, congregational art committee members, and denominational staff. In some interviews, I found myself consistently feeling on the defensive. I was being told implicitly—and more than once very explicitly—that I, my church, and my theological tradition have got it all wrong.

My particular corner of the Christian world, the Christian Reformed community, often has a very robust theological sense of self. We've got a respectable intellectual heritage, an effective and influential theological vocabulary, and a list of well-known scholars and preachers and teachers. False humility is not one of our problems. (Adequate humility may be!) Not surprisingly, then, it turns out that I don't respond all that well to being told that I, my church, and my theological tradition have got it all wrong.

When it happened I found myself thinking, "Hey, outsider! Who are you to be so critical of my tribe?" Except that at this moment, sitting in your office, asking for your time, I am the outsider, asking you to answer my questions, and in order for you to answer my questions, you pretty much have to describe the historical junctures where your tribe and my tribe parted ways. That brings with it a value judgment about what constitutes the true path, and what represents a grievous deviation from that path. My interviewees were only doing what I'd asked.

Some of those interviews were deeply discomfounding. While I wasn't noticing, a conversation about art had subtly morphed into a conversation about identity. The "help me understand" element of the interview, question by question and response by response, would transform into a "you're wrong, I'm right" apologetic. To be fair to myself, it takes two to tango. When my interviewees could stick to the "help me understand" track, I could too. But when they headed off into normative judgment territory, it was hard for me not to follow them right down that road. I remained calm and polite on the outside, but on the inside I was irritated at best, dismissive at worst. Ouch.

In a lovely essay titled, "Receptive Ecumenism, Ecclesial Learning, and the "Tribe,"" James Sweeney...
describes the tribal complexities that can emerge in ecumenical encounters. On the one hand, he writes, for anthropologists, "tribe is a virtuous term: a social grouping at a certain stage of economic and cultural development with a clearly delineated identity; a distinct people with its own special characteristics and history; a coordinated system of mythical beliefs and practices; the repository of cultural values and artefacts." On the other hand,

Ecumenical learning from 'the other' clearly involves very complex transactions when 'the other' represents those with whom one has been locked in conflict and over against whom one's ecclesial identity has been forged...[T]here are historic resentments, sometimes unacknowledged, sometimes repressed. It is hardly surprising if the praxis and spiritual attitude of ecumenical learning are rare. An irenic willingness to learn from the other may be an easy habit for the academic mind, but it's not the norm of everyday life."

In the interactions I just described, what began as "an irenic willingness to learn from the other" ended up colliding with "conflicts over against which ecclesial identities had been forged."

Given our frailties and faults as particular, embodied individuals, the slippage from peaceful encounter to identity threat is probably inevitable. Those of us who teach have probably witnessed or been party to such slippage on our own campuses or in our own classrooms. Add to that the varied levels of ecclesial self-awareness and maturity among our students (and perhaps among ourselves as well), and might it even be a bit presumptuous to assume that "an irenic willingness to learn from the other" is "an easy habit for the academic mind"? It's not that polemic is always inappropriate, or that apologetics are off the table. But they are different dialogical modes, and much more familiar and habitual for academics. Are we sufficiently able to model what "irenic willingness to learn" looks like in action? Are there forums or venues where we can practice "irenic encounter" and learn to bracket the kind of anxieties that lead to identity threat, and the rhetorical moves that lead to polemic? Imagine that we actually become practiced at "irenic encounter." What benefits might that have for all sorts of other learning that needs to happen on our campuses?

**Story Two: Behaving Badly on Good Friday**

Midway through my research I had one experience that haunts me to this day. It was the most extreme of instances where I found myself objecting profoundly to what I saw being offered in the name of worship. This type of experience was more of an issue when examining the practices of my own tribe, where I felt an enfranchised permission to be critical. But exactly how much criticism or irritation or even outrage (I'd like to imagine it was righteous outrage), is permissible?

This particular instance involved a visit to a highly regarded, art-committed congregation in Southern California on Good Friday. The service was indeed artistically engaged, but engaged in a way that I found sickeningly inappropriate. This was the worst of a handful of upsetting experiences I encountered in the course of my research—upsetting not just because of what I saw, but because of how I reacted to what saw. These are my fellow Christians. These are my brothers and sisters in Christ. They care about art; I care about art. They are my allies in this project. And yet they did THAT! How could they?!

Such experiences were meta-upsetting. It was profoundly distressing to find myself responding not just intellectually, but vehemently, viscerally, and, it felt, with intemperate criticism. This wasn’t identity threat. My reaction wasn’t about protecting or explaining myself. It was simply a strong sense of disgust. And the intensity of that disgust was disorienting and troubling.
In trying to make sense of these experiences, I found Margret O’Gara’s typology of ecumenical gifts helpful. O’Gara characterizes ecumenical dialogue as a kind of gift exchange. She describes one exchange as “differentiated consensus” (the Lutheran/Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, for example), another as “corrective balance” (the Anglican/Catholic Commission on Eucharistic Doctrine, for example) and a third as pure “gift exchange” (the Mennonite/Catholic “Bridgefolk” movement, for example). She also considers “the gift offered but not received.” “One gift offered in the ecumenical gift exchange,” she writes, “is serious criticism.”

“Serious criticism” might be a virtuous version of the “failed attempt at irect encounter” in my first story. But in order to qualify, serious criticism cannot be simple grandstanding for one’s own status quo. The best serious criticism, it seems to me, is that which emerges from irect encounter. Having earnestly sought to understand, having learned from the best representatives of the other tradition, and having thought through the implications of that learning for our own tribe—well then, perhaps at that point, we might have a worthy question to pose. Importantly, my critical reaction to that particular Good Friday service was itself rooted my ecumenical learning. The questions I would have posed to the leadership of that church, had they invited me to converse with them, were informed by learning about the how the arts work across the entire Christian spectrum. I won’t return to that particular congregation—and the leadership there has changed, and that particular service was a never-to-be repeated, one-off event. But O’Gara’s discussion of ecumenical gift exchange has helped me make sense of that experience, and has encouraged me to take heart that perhaps my strong reaction was not just judgmental and uncharitable, but may have included some ecumenically informed “serious criticism.” I’ll continue to ponder that. I’ll also continue to ponder how we, at Westmont, might create venues, forums, and exercises that build on irect encounters so as to rightly and constructively entertain serious criticism.

Story Three: Discovering Kindred Spirits

Happily, the experiential component of my accidental ecumenism also yielded encounters that were discombobulating in a good way—encounters so wonderfully illuminating, that only in retrospect can I see that they were also, initially, a little disorienting.

I have to credit much of my learning, and quite a few insights, to two people. The first is Bob, an architect. Bob works in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he designed all kinds of buildings, including churches and Catholic-school chapels. Bob is a busy guy, but he was happy to receive me in his studio and answer my questions. What I remember so vividly was Bob’s infectious love for God, for God’s church, and for his own work as an architect. You could not talk with this man and not be drawn in to the world he loves so much. Book after book came down off his shelves. Blueprint after blueprint, excavated from his files. Address after address hastily scribbled down—places for me to visit to see good Catholic design in brick and mortar. As I listened to him, I began to realize, with some shame, that the Grand Rapids I’d known growing up was much bigger than I’d imagined. It was filled with Catholics like

Bob, who lived and breathed and ate “church” just like my own Christian Reformed community did. Of course, I knew intellectually there was a large Catholic community in Grand Rapids. I’d pass Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church and School every day. And it goes without saying that “some of my best friends were Catholic.” But here, in the person of Bob, I saw for the first time the depth and richness of this whole parallel world of energetic, joyful, faithful Christians, there all along, but beyond my limited sight. My faith was truly transformed in that meeting. I drive through Grand Rapids now—and any city, for that matter—with different eyes. I only regret that it didn’t happen sooner.

The second person is Darya, the wife of the priest of the small Russian Orthodox congregation outside Grand Rapids. She’s also the congregation’s iconographer, having painted all the icons for their iconostasis. I recall, with equally vivid pleasure, the two of us sitting on either side of Darya’s worktable in the cool of the yellow-painted, cinder block basement of St. Herman’s—a basement that smelled of damp cement, cleaning fluid, varnish, and just a hint of mildew—as ecclesial a scent, in my opinion, as incense.

Here, in the person of Bob, I saw for the first time the depth and richness of this whole parallel world of energetic, joyful, faithful Christians, there all along, but beyond my limited sight.

Darya is a born teacher. She invited me into her world and showed me around, finding apt analogies and metaphors that helped me better understand the internal logic of Orthodoxy. She was infinitely gentle and patient with my sometimes obtuse, incessant questions. I also discovered that Darya loves the history of art and that she had studied under a very prominent art historian when she was an undergraduate at Wellesley. She shared with me that she had long been called to pray for this professor, even after all these years, because when she was his student, she thought him so religiously open and curious. Her comment brought me up short. I’ve rarely prayed for my non-Christian academic colleagues, except if they or one of their loved ones was sick. Praying for the souls of my non-Christian academic friends seemed presumptuous. It hadn’t crossed my mind as something I could do, as something I should do.

But here’s the weird thing about that exchange. I’d just met the object of Darya’s prayers. We’d recently had him out to Westmont for our annual Conversation on the Liberal Arts. He was indeed an impressive scholar, and more than that, an excellent person. Sometimes the big-name scholars we invite to this event play their role perfunctorily, arriving in time for their session and departing as soon as it wraps up. Darya’s professor, however, didn’t just stay for the entire gathering, he wrote an entirely new paper just for our purposes and participated eagerly in all the breakout sessions and small-group discussions. Over dinner, I discovered the same curiosity and openness about religion in his questions about Westmont and Westmont students that Darya had sensed many years ago in his classroom. I encouraged Darya to keep praying. And I began to wonder about my own habits of prayer and petition. If Bob challenged and expanded my experience of my Christian community, Darya rattled my sense of my relationship to my professional peers.

Both James Sweeney and Margaret O’Gara shed light on what went right in these two encounters—Sweeney emphasizing healthy identity, and
O'Gara emphasizing healthy academic practice. Sweeney discusses what he calls “steady state identity.” “Selfhood” he writes, is acquired by repeated engagement from within the determined frame which reinforces communal beliefs and values. ... at the same time, variations are explored renewing and extending the frame, and in this way learning occurs. “Steady state” is a balance between stability and openness, neither over-determined by the frame nor destabilized by external influences.

With Bob and with Darya, I encountered fellow Christians working out of that confident, mature, steady state, which allowed me in turn to remain in my steady state: none of us over-determined by our positions, nor threatened by questions or different perspectives.

When we are grounded in our “steady state,” other good things can happen. “Real ecumenical collaboration calls for willingness to enter into relationships, to risk vulnerability for the sake of the common effort, and to refuse competition as an acceptable mode for serious inquiry,” O'Gara writes. “Ecumenical work only proceeds when competition is eschewed.... Ecumenical research actually serves as a countercultural model within academic circles, recalling scholars to an earlier ideal of being truly a college together.”

Learning and Ecumenical Learning

What all these encounters share, whether pleasantly discombobulating or otherwise, is a dynamic of disorientation, sometimes followed by the experience of re-orientation. In college—the emotionally laden, psychologically and socially complex encounters with staff and faculty, with course material, and with peers. These encounters that disturb, re-arrange, and then (we pray) reconstitute an enlarged and deepened person, with a greater capacity to understand, to know, and to love neighbor and self. Some of that learning is already and inevitably ecumenical. But what might we learn, what might we learn about learning, and what might we accomplish if we committed to more formal and programmatic approaches to ecumenical learning?

As an accidental ecumenist, I am hardly the expert on these questions. But I hope our collective wisdom will help us consider what learning in general shares with specifically ecumenical learning. We might ponder what types of ecumenical learning might best suit our own contexts, and the extent to which more intentional engagement with ecumenical learning could help deepen and strengthen not just student learning, but also the work and witness of our colleges and universities.

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THE EYES I HAVE DESIRED

"O spring like crystal! / If only, on your silvered-over faces, / you would
suddenly form / the eyes I have desired, / which I bear sketched deep within
my heart." — John of the Cross, "The Spiritual Canticle"

Like a bride I walk upon petals,
cobalt florets kiss my arms as they
tumble, soft stars beneath by feet.
Panicles of lavender dot perfect above
in jacaranda and sky, Ezekiel's
sapphire throne of God glints,
cirrus angels touch leaden angles of
horizon. Scrub jays call, arrow azure.

All this falling down from heaven, so
fleeting, yet my momentary eyes
meet firmament, the unmoved
moving intensity of blue gaze.

For one long caught breath, even the hawks
swing down for me.

Laura Reece Hogan
Feeling Our Way Forward
Lessons from a Common Life

Daniel A. Keating

I am what is often called a “cradle-Catholic,” raised in a veritable Catholic ghetto in the western suburbs of Cleveland. Growing up I knew exactly one Protestant family, my next-door neighbors, who were Lutheran. With precocious theological acumen, I grasped quite quickly that the main ecumenical difference between us was that I had to go to church on Sunday, while my friend Andy did not. (It seemed to us then that he had the better deal.) There was, however, one shaft of ecumenical light that penetrated my Catholic world on a weekly basis: every Sunday at dinner my family would pray a special prayer—a Hail Mary!—for the cause of Christian unity. My parents had imbibed the ecumenical impetus of the Second Vatican Council, and several of their children (myself included) have since blamed them for our active participation in ecumenical ventures.

My Catholic hothouse experience changed dramatically when I enrolled at the University of Michigan. Following the lead of two older brothers, I began to participate in a student group on campus that was linked to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, but which had a wide representation of students from various Protestant churches (and the occasional Orthodox). My near total ignorance of other Christians was quickly transformed into a reasonable knowledge of and exposure to a cross-section of Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, and Reformed Christians. Rooming with a Presbyterian my second year and a black Baptist my third year enormously heightened my lived experience of ecumenism and cultivated within me what has come to be a lifelong commitment to seek Christian unity.

In my early twenties, my own sense of calling led me to explore and then join a brotherhood of men, called the Servants of the Word. From its origins it has had an ecumenical membership, even though most members are Catholic. When in the early 1990s we passed through a season of trial that included the questioning of our ecumenical life, I helped write a statement of our ecumenical approach and served as the main editor for it. During three years of theological study at Oxford University, I was thrown in with fellow doctoral students from a wide variety of Christian backgrounds. Together we actively discussed and debated every possible issue (it seemed), while meeting together regularly for lunch and Bible study. Finally, as a faculty member at Sacred Heart Major Seminary, I was asked to draw up and then teach the course on ecumenism for master of divinity students. I have taught that course for the past ten years. I am presently involved in a national Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue, mutually sponsored by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and various participating evangelical denominations.

All this is meant to give just a sketch of how a fellow from a Catholic ghetto found himself enmeshed in ecumenism. It has shaped my adult life and continues to provide an exhilarating (if challenging) adventure in Christian living. How dull things would be without the complicated excellence of real ecumenical engagement!

Receptive Ecumenism as a Strategy

For the past twenty-five years, a chorus of voices has identified our present time as an “ecu-
menical winter.” I recall how in the mid-1990s many were bemoaning the retreat from ecumenical engagement and the loss of confidence to press ahead. While times have certainly changed, the conviction that we are living in an ecumenical ebb tide continues to persist today.¹

The idea of “receptive ecumenism” emerged as a positive response to this ecumenical impasse.² The general view was that bilateral dialogues and efforts at “convergent ecumenism” had largely run their course.³ Other tides, especially a resurgent confessional identity-seeking, were coming in even as the older ecumenical tide was running out.

Given this situation, what should be done? Paul D. Murray of Durham University pioneered a vision for moving forward, what he called “receptive ecumenism,” and many joined with him to advance this approach among the churches. In Murray’s words, receptive ecumenism begins not by asking others to become more like us, but by asking ourselves this question: “What can we learn, or receive, with integrity from our various others in order to facilitate our own growth together into deepened communion in Christ and the Spirit?”⁴ Murray explains that “the primary aim is not the promotion of increased mutual understanding and appreciation between traditions but of continuing ecclesial conversion, deepening and expansive growth within traditions.”⁵ Thomas Ryan helpfully situates receptive ecumenism within our contemporary context as an interim strategy:

Receptive ecumenism offers itself as an interim strategy to keep some wind in the sails. It’s a remarkably simple but far-reaching strategy that now places at center stage a value that has already been implicitly at work in all genuine ecumenical encounters: What can we learn and receive from the other that would enrich and strengthen our own faith and practice?⁶

Peter Leithart insists that receptive ecumenism does not mean watering down our respective ecclesial identities, but demands a posture of humility and a willingness to learn from the other.

Receptive ecumenism is an ecumenism of hospitality, welcome, and listening, an ecumenism of gift exchange. It is rooted in our acknowledgement that we do not know or possess everything we need in our own branch of the Church.... Receptivity does not involve diluting or abandoning our identity. In receiving from others, we are enriched as the particular kinds of Christians we are.⁷

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¹ For example, see Michael Root, “Ecumenical Winter?” First Things (Oct. 2018).
² There were other responses to the perceived impasse facing traditional ecumenical activity; for example, Touchstone sponsored a 2001 conference, “Christian Unity and the Divisions We Must Sustain,” launching what they called a “new ecumenism” to bring together creedal Christians who acknowledge differences but seek to work together for the sake of the gospel and the common good in society.
³ For example, see Sarah Timmer, “Receptive Ecumenism and Justification: Roman Catholic and Reformed Doctrine in Contemporary Context,” PhD dissertation (Marquette University, 2009). “Convergent Ecumenism” emphasizes the churches growing closer together in faith and practice and seeks for eventual full communion on this basis.
⁵ Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism as a Catholic Calling: Catholic Teaching on Ecumenism from Blessed Pope John Paul II to His Holiness Pope Francis,” paper given to the International Theological Institute, Vienna (Nov. 19, 2014). Available at: https://iti.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/user_upload/News-Events/pdfs/Dr-Paul-Murray-Vienna-Receptive-Ecumenism-Handout.pdf.
⁷ Peter J. Leithart, “Receptive Ecumenism,” First Things
To sum up, receptive ecumenism makes two concessions that open it up to fruitful exchange and real growth. The first is to admit that we face significant and often intractable differences among our various churches, and that we will make the best progress by acknowledging these differences and working with them. The second follows from this, that it may be a long time before we are able to find our way to the full unity in faith and practice that we seek. The aims of receptive ecumenism are more modest: not to reach for full, visible unity but to encourage each church to examine what it can learn from others, and then to find a path to work toward real change from within. The conviction is that if we all are doing this within our own churches in humble confidence before God, we will in fact grow toward greater unity.

Though I have not seen this connection made in the literature on receptive ecumenism, there are striking similarities between this revised strategy and the recommendations of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) who offered his views in the context of the same season of ecumenical winter. Benedict consistently points to the need for each church and tradition to press into Christ Jesus more fully, and to aim for greater holiness and purification. His conviction is that if we all do this, we will necessarily grow closer to each other because we are each growing closer to Christ ecclesially. While this is not the same move made by receptive ecumenism, Benedict's proposal also puts the onus of responsibility on the individual churches to work for their own renewal and reform. At the same time, Benedict pleads for the necessity of what he calls “intermediate goals” if we are to find our way forward together toward unity: 

The actual goal of all ecumenical endeavors must naturally be to convert the plurality of the separate denominational churches into the plurality of local churches which, in reality, form one church despite their many and varied characteristics. However...in a given situation it will be necessary to establish realistic intermediate goals; for, otherwise, ecumenical enthusiasm could turn to resignation or, worse, revert to a new embitterment which would place the blame for the breakdown of the great goal on the others. Thus the final days would be worse than the first. These intermediate goals will be different depending on how far individual dialogues will have progressed.8

By realistic intermediate goals, Ratzinger means things like common charitable works, common witness to Christian morality, and common witness of the Gospel to the wider culture. If we pursue these together, he believes, then all this would have to lead to a point where the common features of Christian living are recognized and loved despite the separations, where separation serves no longer as a reason for contradiction, but rather as a challenge to an inner understanding and an acceptance of the other which will amount to more than mere tolerance: a belonging together in the loyalty and faithfulness we show for Jesus Christ.9

What Ratzinger points to here is a common work done together, whereas receptive ecumenism emphasizes each church bringing renewal to itself through reception of the other. Nonetheless, the two proposals have much in common. For both, full unity is simply too far away to reach; in the meantime real progress can be made “on the ground” as we work together, or work to receive from the other, and so grow in genuine unity. In both cases, we are not required to fully agree with each other in order to benefit from one another and see the overall work of unity increase. I believe both proposals share a common viewpoint and seek to fill this present ecumenical space with a spiritual labor that can bring us forward on the path to unity.

Experience of Lived Ecumenism

The kind of ecumenism that I have been involved with for many years involves living a common life together with people from churches not in full communion with each other, and in that

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9 Ratzinger, 226.
common life seeking to express the fruitfulness of what we share in common while respecting our differences and leaving ample room for individuals to experience and express their church commitments and practices. What we have sought to express in our celibate community was not framed at our origins in terms of “receptive ecumenism.” We simply experienced a call and impetus to join together in a common life and to give common witness, and we felt our way forward.

When I present the work of ecumenism to my students, I offer a typology of five connected but distinguishable avenues to unity available to us. These are: (1) unity of the faith believed and confessed; (2) unity expressed through common prayer; (3) unity expressed in common action; (4) unity expressed in common witness to the gospel; and (5) unity expressed in common life. Though the ecumenical life of my community expresses something of each avenue, we are especially an expression of what Cardinal Walter Kasper calls the “ecumenism of life,” meant to complement and bring to fruition the “ecumenism of truth” and the “ecumenism of love.” Here is how Kasper says this:

We have to fill the interim stage that we have reached (of a real if not complete church communio) with real life. The “ecumenism of love” and the “ecumenism of truth,” which both naturally remain very important, must be complemented by an “ecumenism of life.” We have to apply all that we have achieved to the way we actually live.¹⁰

How might the common life of my community appear through the lens of receptive ecumenism, as actively drawing on the resources and riches of various traditions in the crafting of a common life together? To begin with the people involved: we are predominately Catholics, but have members from a variety of mainline Protestant churches (Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist). We have had people from both the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox communions participate in our life for a season but none have remained longer-term. Our common life could be described as a blend of Vatican II-inspired Catholic renewal and the experience of the Holy Spirit gained from the Pentecostal movement, with other important things added along the way. I sometimes describe our DNA more specifically as a blend of the Cursillo movement and the Charismatic Renewal. While helpful, this is too simplistic. Along with these is a strong influence from the Protestant world, especially a scripturally-grounded spirituality and a focus on mission. Many of the books that circulated in our founding years came from traditional Protestant authors as well as Free Church charismatic leaders.

Our prayer life is a hybrid of traditional and contemporary elements. We have developed a simplified form of morning, evening, and night prayers that draws on the patterns found in the Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran traditions. But following this more structured prayer, we engage in free prayer with singing and praying in a Pentecostal-Charismatic style. In the center of our common prayer is a daily meditation and reflection on the scripture, and each member is encouraged to make scriptural reading and study the core of one's spiritual life, supplemented by other sources.

Two other influences deserve mention in this context. The Orthodox tradition and spirituality has not had a founding influence on our common life, but we have always held the East in high regard and regularly read (and draw upon) Eastern writers and theologians. Finally, there has been a subtle but very real Jewish influence in our common life, mediated by the presence of Messianic Jews in our midst. The most notable impact of this is a service we have developed for our common life that adapts the Jewish Sabbath prayers for the celebration of the Christian Lord's Day. Most weeks we pray these prayers and set aside the Lord's Day in the home, following the pattern learned from the Jewish community. This influence has also led us to grow in a deeper appreciation of the Old Testament as an active and important part of the scriptures that we read and meditate upon.

At a certain point in the 1990s, in part due to challenges and crises in our own community, we

¹⁰ Walter Kasper, That They May All Be One (New York: Burns & Oates, 2004), 72.
recognized the need to set down with greater clarity the principles and practices of our ecumenical common life. We worked on this statement over several years, seeking commentary and correction from pastors and theologians of the main church families: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant (we invited Lutheran, Reformed, and Free Church advisors to comment on the document). No statement like this can ever be fully complete or finished: it is always a work in progress. But it has served us well for the past twenty years.

The statement of our ecumenical approach begins and concludes with a call and vision statement that guides our ecumenical spirituality. This orientation places our call within the wider ecumenical movement among the churches and explicitly states that we desire to follow the leading of the Spirit and the wisdom of our pastors in how we carry out our ecumenical life and witness.

In the first main section, we position our ecumenical practice within the wider field of ecumenical activity. Distinguishing what we do from ecumenical dialogue and official church relations, we characterize our model as a type of cooperative ecumenism that involves a form of common life together. Crucial to our approach is the welcome reception of distinctive elements from the various church traditions that can enrich our common life. We say explicitly that we are not seeking a lowest-common-denominator ecumenism, a kind of stripped-down spirituality, but instead we aim to incorporate elements of various traditions that can help bring about a richness in our common experience. The limits to this are plain: we cannot include elements or expressions where there is a clear disagreement.

Much of our common statement describes ecumenical practices: the wisdom for this derives from many years of experience and testing. This includes elements such as the content of our common teaching, the use of authorities in our common life, daily life practices, and how to engage in discussion about differences among us. In order to ensure that our members are able to do all this with adequate knowledge and background, we provide in our formation period a three-part ecumenical studies course that supplies historical and theological background to the major church traditions, and that gives each member an opportunity to study his own tradition in greater detail.

**Challenges and Opportunities**

In summary, I am sobered by the many challenges and obstacles that lie before us but animated nonetheless by the opportunities, and even more by a hope that the Lord God is invested in this work and will bring about fruitfulness despite the challenges.

The first challenge I see is the fact that the outcome of ecumenical activity is often shaped more...
(perhaps much more) by changes in the world around us than by any itinerary that we provide or prescribe. We rightly seek to address issues that have divided us in the past: disagreements over the content of the faith and failures in charity toward one another. But even as we do this, more or less successfully, the world we all live in races ahead, provoking new issues that threaten to overwhelm not only our ecumenical engagement but the very life and unity of each of our churches. An example: the fall of communism in Eastern Europe profoundly affected the ecumenical movement, and since the 1990s has made it more difficult for the Orthodox churches to engage freely and constructively in ecumenical matters. Due to the influx of Catholics and Protestants into Eastern Europe, Orthodox leaders perceived a serious threat to their existence and so pulled back from the ecumenical movement. It was like a tidal wave that swept over the ecumenical landscape.

A second example: the effects of postmodern thought have produced a negative reaction to "branding," particularly in politics and religion, such that we find a wider societal movement that inclines young people especially to identify as "spiritual" or "religious" but to eschew denominational affiliation and identity. As a minority counter-reaction, the tendency to what we might call hyper-confessionalism is often strongly present in our most committed circles of church members. And between these two tendencies it becomes more difficult to forge a healthy church identity that is also open to Christians of other traditions.

A third example: the wider gender movement, in all its variety, has brought enormous challenges to all the churches and opened new and deep fissures over issues such as women's ordination, same-sex marriage, and transgenderism. While we make progress on ancient issues of disagreement, new fissures are emerging that are triggered not so much by inter-church problems but by developments in the modern world. New and intractable issues arise even as we try to deal with older ones, and we are not in charge of the agenda.

The second major challenge that I see can be framed as follows: Is there any real hope for ecumenical reception in our churches, given the internal dynamics and challenges that our churches face? When I present to graduate seminarians what the Catholic Ecumenical Directory (of 1993) proposes for ecumenical education and formation at all levels of the church, the response is a glazed look and a shake of the head. How are we to provide solid and sound ecumenical formation to Catholics at all levels when they have not received, and are not receiving, sound formation in the basics of Catholic doctrine in the first place? When identity-formation is already at a critically low ebb, when it seems that the patient may be dying on the table, the thought of helping Catholics understand and receive an orientation to other Christians and to Christian unity seems unrealistic and unrealizable.

To sharpen the challenge we face: if ecumenical work remains largely at the level of dialogue—of discussion and activity among selected experts—it has little or no chance of making a lasting impact on the life of the churches. In a chapter from a volume on receptive ecumenism, Ladislas Örsy states the problem acutely: "Dialogues among experts (or among delegated officials) are not enough to lead to reunion—not even if they produce an agreement. This warning should not be construed as an argument against dialogues; they should continue. But their limits must be recognized. Only a unified community can create an authentic process of learning and receiving." Our churches possess real cultures and patterns of living, confessing, and worshiping, even if those cultures are being gravely eroded in our time. To make an impact on

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11 Many commentators of our present climate point to these two extremes. Paul D. Murray, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, 10-11, identifies these two opposite trends: the first, a turn away from clear doctrinal expression and identification with a church body; the second, a re-intensification of differences and denominational identity in part because of institutional decline and failures (10-11).

the life of the churches, ecumenism has to penetrate to where people actually believe and live. It has to take shape within a real, lived community. But even when this occurs, it is a great challenge to communicate this “receptive way of life” to local churches that are heavily besieged and struggling to maintain a positive identity capable of attracting people to Christ and the way of life practiced by its people.

Where, then, can we find grounds for hope? Where do we draw strength for the profound challenges that beset the ecumenical venture? First and foremost, our hope has to be in God: that the Father is acting to unite the body of his Son through the work of the Spirit, and that our efforts are, at root, simply joining and cooperating with what God is already doing. If this is not the case, then our efforts are hopeless and pointless. But in fact, there are many people from across our churches who are convinced that God is acting to bring about greater unity—this witness itself is a source of great encouragement.

Secondly, ecumenism has to be joined with mission if it is to have the energy and attractive power to make a genuine difference. The sheer conviction that Christians should be one and united is a marvelous truth that deeply motivates many of us all by itself. But given the enormous challenges faced by Christians today, unity for its own sake is unlikely to provide a compelling motive for most Christians. To become fully relevant, ecumenism has to be wedded to mission in both its positive and defensive aspects. This is not to create a pragmatic or functional linkage between ecumenism and mission—the two belong together by their very nature. By “defensive” I mean a common sense of threat to the Gospel and its way of life. We don’t need to invent these threats—they are fully there for all who have eyes to see. It is often the experience of common threats that brings people together and energizes them to work together when otherwise they would not.

Still, the sense of threat cannot predominate in a healthy ecumenism. The positive sense of mission—of bringing the life and ministry of Jesus to the world, of introducing people to friendship with God and true freedom in the Spirit—must be the primary motive force. Granted, some of our deepest disputes concern just what this mission is and how to advance it. But without the positive sense of mission, ecumenism is destined to remain an enclave of the few and have little impact on the churches.

Finally, from my own experience of a common ecumenical life, I would propose that real communities of people are essential for a robust and receptive ecumenism to flourish. In the words of Walter Kasper: “The churches did not diverge only through discussion, they diverged through alienation, i.e. the way they lived. Therefore they have to come closer to each other again in their lives; they must get accustomed to each other, pray together, work together and live together.”

Ecumenism has to be joined with mission if it is to have the energy and attractive power to make a genuine difference.

These communities can and should take many forms, but without the expression of real life on the ground, without the experience of personal commitment to other people and the real cost of sharing some measure of life together, the idea of a robust and receptive ecumenism is likely to remain just that—an idea. It needs a location within a genuine community of believers, joined by their commitment to work for unity together, if it is to germinate, grow, and bear the fruit (thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold) that we hope and trust God intends.

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13 Walter Kasper, That They May All Be One (New York: Burns & Oates, 2004), 72.
Receptive Ecumenism and the Reconstruction of Christian Identity in Christian Higher Education

Steven R. Harmon

Fourteen years ago, the Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University sponsored a conference titled “Christianity and the Soul of the University: Faith as a Foundation for Intellectual Community.” Part of its impetus was conflict—both internal and external—over Baylor’s institutional vision for becoming a top-tier research university while strengthening its Christian identity through the interdisciplinary integration of faith and learning.¹

In my paper for that conference, I noted that numerous other universities with historic church-related ties faced similar skirmishes over Christian identity. Many faculty members at such institutions, I suggested, had “had the experience of discussing religious matters at lunch with fellow faculty members from various departments or schools and realizing during a less-than-cordial turn in the conversation that the cross-disciplinary integration of faith and learning in their own institution would be rough going indeed.” I attributed this to three factors. First, faculty members had experienced the theological-political polarization of their denominations and weren’t eager for these battles to be re-enacted on their campuses. Second, the politicization of academic disciplines and professional fields in relation to the American “culture wars” had been met with conflicting claims about the positions Christians ought to take in those conflicts. Third, religious studies faculty are formed by an academic theological education as well as by the church, while faculty in other disciplines have a theological formation primarily from church and para-church contexts; this had sometimes led to mutual suspicion of one another’s theological perspectives. These factors coalesced into an aversion to the intellectual conflict that might arise from efforts at transdisciplinary theological engagement.

Moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre proposes some helpful ways to regard the contested character of a community’s tradition. In his book After Virtue, he defined “a living tradition” as “an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.” If a tradition doesn’t embody this continuity of conflict, he writes, “it is always dying or dead.”²

In 2004, I argued that MacIntyre’s understanding of traditioned rationality and the necessary conflict it entails has much potential for overcoming the aforementioned obstacles to a robust reclamation of Christian institutional identity. I continue to believe that this is an immensely helpful way to frame the Christian identity of a Christian university. A Christian university need not be—and perhaps ought not to be—a place that advocates for particular positions on the range of matters currently dividing the American body

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² Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 222.
politic and churches alike. But it can and should be a place where these issues are earnestly contested by Christians who disagree about them. Such contestation is not an end in itself, but rather a means of moving together toward a deeper understanding of God's truth and how we should live in light of it.

That is also an approach to Christian institutional identity that makes for a robust and receptive ecumenism, though I didn't use that terminology in 2004. I did recognize back then that the ecumenical diversity of most Christian university faculties was a resource for making Christian faith foundational for intellectual community. In my paper I wrote, “The encounter, and even conflict, of multiple denominational traditions in the Christian university is beneficial both to the sponsoring tradition [institution] and to the Church catholic: it requires that our story be genuinely contested.” Now I return to that sentence as a point of departure for developing the theme of our conference.

As an ecumenical theologian, I now recognize that the ecumenical diversity of Christian university faculties is not only a resource for making Christian faith foundational for intellectual community; the ecumenical diversity of Christian university faculties, student bodies, and broader constituencies is a resource also for the participation of the divided church in the quest for the unity Christ prayed for his followers. This is not an end in itself, but a means by which the church participates in the mission of God to draw all creation toward the full realization of God's creative purposes. It is also a resource for the participation of Christian universities themselves in this quest of the church in relation to the divine mission.

A couple of things that have changed since I first made connections between Christian higher education and ecumenical encounter a decade and a half ago, both in my own work and in the larger context in which we're thinking about the identity of Christian universities. My contribution to the faith-and-learning conversation in the mid-2000s came during a shift in the focus of my work. My early research and writing had focused on patristic theology, the thought of theologians in the first few centuries of the church. I was one of the relatively few Baptist scholars then doing work in that field (that tribe has since increased). This led to invitations from the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), the world communion for Baptists, to serve on delegations to international ecumenical dialogues with other Christian communions for which the patristic theological tradition has significance. A few months before the 2004 Baylor conference, I had my first experience of ecumenical dialogue as a member of the Baptist World Alliance delegation to the North American phase of the bilateral dialogue between the BWA and the Anglican Communion. During my participation, I realized that all other aspects of my theological work seemed oriented toward and fulfilled in this ecumenical task of theology in the service of the divided church. I recognized this as a calling within my vocation to a ministry of theological education, and soon I had other opportunities to participate in ecumenical dialogue, including dialogues between the BWA and the Catholic Church, in preliminary conversations with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and as the BWA representative to the World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order. Most of my writing since then has focused on ecumenical theology. Through that work I've developed some perspectives on ecumenism that may help us to conceive of Christian universities as places of robust and receptive ecumenical encounter. First, though, some history about the modern ecumenical movement will provide clarity and context.

It's no accident that the nineteenth-century beginnings of the modern ecumenical movement coincided with the beginnings of the modern missions movement. The missionaries quickly concluded that taking a divided Christianity to the mission field scandalized their witness for Christ, and some of them issued the earliest modern calls for ecumenical convergence. One such call came from William Carey, a Baptist missionary to India. In 1806 Carey proposed that “a general association of all denominations of Christians from the four quarters of the earth” meet each decade at the Cape of Good Hope. Carey's dream was realized in part a century later by the 1910 World Missionary Conference, which gave birth to the International Missionary Conference in 1921. These gatherings were initially limited.
to Protestants, but they served as the nucleus for what became the primary institutional expression of the worldwide ecumenical movement.

One of the speakers at the 1910 World Missionary Conference was Bishop Charles Brent, an Episcopal missionary to the Philippines from the United States. Brent urged conference participants not to be content with merely seeking greater cooperation in missions among the denominations, since visible unity would require that divisive issues of doctrine and church order be addressed. He called for creating an international commission devoted to studying the matters of faith and order that presently divided the churches, and he personally made this proposal to representatives of the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and the various Protestant communions. In 1927 a World Conference on Faith and Order held its initial meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, with representatives of all major Christian communions, including the Orthodox, but with the exception of the Catholic Church. Two years earlier, the Conference on Life and Work had been founded in Stockholm to seek worldwide cooperation between the churches in addressing social issues in the wake of the industrial revolution and the First World War.

Cooperation in mission, joint work on doctrine and church order, and solidarity in social action—these three complementary expressions of the worldwide ecumenical movement ultimately coalesced in a unified institutional embodiment of the quest for Christian unity. In 1948 the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements joined to form the World Council of Churches, (WCC) and in 1961 the International Missionary Conference alsomerged into the WCC. The ecumenical movement has been its healthiest when these three emphases—mission, doctrine, and social justice—have gone hand in hand. It’s suffered whenever any one of those emphases has dominated to the neglect of the others.

In 1961, the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi issued what is now regarded as the classic definition of the visible unity sought by the ecumenical movement:

> We believe that the unity which is both God’s will and [God’s] gift to [God’s] Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully-committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages, in such ways that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls [God’s] people. 4

The New Delhi definition is now commonly embraced as the best concise explanation of the ecumenical movement’s goal. It imagines what the destination might look like rather than providing a roadmap for getting there. There are no voices asking from the back seat, “Are we there yet?” because everyone in the car knows that we’ve not yet seen that place.

Since the New Delhi Assembly, the goal of visible unity has become both more plausibly near and more seemingly distant. On the one hand, the ecumenical movement has perhaps enjoyed greater successes within a shorter timeline than its framers may have imagined possible. The Second Vatican Council marked the full entry of the largest global communion of Christians, the Catholic Church, into the modern ecumenical movement and its institutional instruments. In 1982 the WCC Faith and Order Commission issued a convergence statement on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry. It was the fruit of fifty years of multilateral work on Faith and Order, shaped by input from representatives of all Christian communions. It commended two legitimate patterns for uniting baptism, personal faith, and Christian formation in a way that has encouraged much progress toward mutual baptismal recognition, between churches that baptize only those who have embraced the faith of their own

volition and churches that also baptize infants whom the church nurtures in faith.

The most exciting outcome of the bilateral dialogues is the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification ratified by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church on October 31 that year. This fundamental consensus on the doctrine of justification, with remaining differences understood as not imperiling this consensus, became a multilateral consensus in 2006, when it was joined by the World Methodist Council. In 2017, the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, both the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Anglican Communion also joined the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. There remain other church-dividing issues, but the very doctrine that divided the Western church in the sixteenth century is no longer one of them.

Justification as the gracious work by which God accepts us as righteous and makes us righteous may now be considered an ecumenically shared doctrine.

The ecumenical movement has enjoyed great successes, but we’re also in the midst of what many ecumenists have called an “ecumenical winter.” There are many reasons for this, but I’ll name four. First, the denominations that historically led the ecumenical movement have now had to turn their energies to their own worsening internal divisions. Second, there’s what Presbyterian ecumenist Joseph Small has called “the scandal of a division that ceases to offend.” It just doesn’t bother us anymore that we don’t have visible unity with other Christians. We already have spiritual unity, and that’s good enough for us. Third, in this world of worsening religiously-motivated violence, interreligious dialogue seems the more urgent endeavor. Working to increase mutual understanding among the religions is desperately needed if we’re to help the world toward God’s goal of community, but our own Christian disunity makes that much more difficult. And fourth, ecumenism has long been perceived as something that concerned only theologians and those at the highest levels of church and denominational leadership. Unfortunately, we haven’t always done a good job of helping Christians at the grassroots to understand that they, too, have a stake in the ecumenical movement and are in fact its most important participants. Participants in this conference can do something about that fourth factor, for our institutions are places where grassroots Christianity intersects with the theological academy and denominational leadership.

There remain other church-dividing issues, but the very doctrine that divided the Western church in the sixteenth century is no longer one of them.

How can we progress further along the road that leads to the visible unity for which our Lord prayed—the place where we are one as Jesus and the Father are one, that the world might believe? It’s clear that the merger of all churches and denominations into a “super church” is not the way forward, nor is a paradigm of “home to ___” (fill in the blank with your own church thought to be the true one; “Rome” isn’t the only way that blank has been filled). It’s also clear that a “thin ecumenism,” one that reduces the basis for visible unity to a lowest-common-denominator Christian identity, does not span the chasm between our current reality and a visible Christian unity. But there is a growing recognition that the best means of navigating this journey is a counter-intuitive one: rather than a “thin” ecumenism that views difference as an unfortunate obstacle to unity that ought to be dispensed with as quickly as possible, the way forward is a “thick” ecumenism that takes difference seriously and embraces difference as a means toward unity. A thick ecumenism is, in other words, a robust ecumenism. It goes deep within our divided traditions both to find our connections to a larger, shared tradition and to appreciate the distinctive, historically conditioned separate journeys that are the bearers of the unique ecclesial gifts that each tradition has to offer the whole church as resources for renewal toward unity.

A recent “robust” ecumenical paradigm that takes difference seriously is “receptive ecumenism.” In receptive ecumenism, communions in
conversation with one another seek to identify distinctive gifts that each tradition has to offer the other and gifts that each could receive from the other with integrity. It's reflected in Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint* ("that they may be one"), which said, “Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some ways it is always an 'exchange of gifts.'”

Some ecumenical dialogues, like the one between the Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, have worked toward concrete proposals for the exchange of ecclesial gifts. Yet as an international conference on receptive ecumenism held at Durham University in 2006 defined this approach, “the primary emphasis is on learning rather than teaching...each tradition takes responsibility for its own potential learning from others and is, in turn, willing to facilitate the learning of others as requested but without dictating terms and without making others' learning a precondition to attending to ones' own.”

In many respects, receptive ecumenism is a more user-friendly approach to ecumenism for churches that haven't yet been active participants in the ecumenical movement. It assumes that because each tradition has been entrusted with a unique historical journey as a people of God, it possesses distinctive gifts to be offered to the rest of the body of Christ. It also suggests the possibility that any tradition can incorporate the gifts of others into its own distinctive pattern of faith and practice without abandoning or distorting the gifts that already define its identity.

As an intentional approach to ecumenical convergence, receptive ecumenism is a new thing—but it has a long history. Look at your hymnal or book of worship, for instance. I've never sung from a Baptist hymnal in which all the hymns were composed by Baptists. Most Baptist hymnals include multiple hymn texts from the ancient church. Beyond these hymns, Baptists receive through their hymnals the liturgical gifts of hymn texts by Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Jesus from the pre-Reformation medieval church; the fifteenth-century Jewish hymn "The God of Abraham Praise" by Daniel ben Judah Dayyan; the hymns and chorales of Martin Luther; the post-Reformation Catholic hymn "Fairest Lord Jesus" from the Münster Gesangbuch; the hymnody of Methodist Charles Wesley; and more recently songs with origins in the Pentecostal movement. Baptists have gladly received these ecclesial gifts from other traditions with their voices and hearts in a well-established form of receptive ecumenism. Other churches have been doing that for a long time, too.

My Baptist tradition has also benefited from the trans-denominational liturgical renewal of the late twentieth century, and today a growing number of Baptist congregations have incorporated other liturgical gifts from beyond the Baptist tradition into their worship: the full Christian year and the liturgical colors that accompany its seasons, the lectionary, the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday and processions with palm fronds at the start of Holy Week, and even incense and icons here and there. The same kind of thing has been happening in other churches, from non-denominational and Pentecostal fellowships to the more self-consciously liturgical churches whose liturgies have been mutually enriched by this trans-denominational liturgical renewal.

There is also a receptive ecumenism that belongs to the sphere of personal piety. Many younger Christians across the denominational spectrum have a keen interest in spirituality, and they're drawn to the practice of spiritual disciplines that originated in churches other than their own. These same younger Christians, along with some more mature ones, are taking up practices that are new to them and their churches, such as meditating on Scripture according to the pattern of Lectio Divina, walking labyrinths, using the sign of the cross as an embodied act of personal devotion, and experimenting with praying the Rosary and using Orthodox chotkis to pray the Jesus Prayer.

In various ways, all our churches have received gifts from other traditions through an ecumenism of the confession of faith, of the sanctuary and the hymnal, of the seminary classroom and pastor's study, and of personal devotion. We've received these gifts from the church in its catholicity along with other Christians and, more directly, from other Christians in a contemporary convergence toward our common catholicity. The more we receive these gifts from each other, the more we become like each other and the less church-dividing our differences become. When we do this
over a long period of time, led by the Spirit, visible unity naturally begins to happen.

Another change since 2004 is the complex of challenges facing Christian higher education in America. In addition to the current fiscal and enrollment challenges generally shared by private liberal arts colleges, there are particular pressures related to cultivating a constituency to populate our student bodies. These affect our respective institutions in different ways; the anecdotal circumstances of my own institution may apply elsewhere, as well.

Gardner-Webb University is a church-related university in North Carolina, about an hour’s drive west of Charlotte, an hour and a half east of Asheville, and an hour north of Greenville, South Carolina. Our historic relationship is to the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, a relationship that is now voluntary; along with other Baptist State Convention-related universities in North Carolina, in the 2000s we renegotiated our relationship so that we now have a self-perpetuating board of trustees and thus are not owned or operated by the Convention. We are beginning to experience the effects of what I call the cultural mainstreaming of evangelical fundamentalism (and by “fundamentalism” I don’t mean the neo-evangelical descendants of the conservative pole in the early twentieth century fundamentalist-modernist controversy, but rather their ultra-conservative cousins who would likely regard the comparatively broad-minded and intellectually sophisticated authors of “The Fundamentals” tracts—among whom were theistic evolutionists like B. B. Warfield—as liberals).

Not too many years ago, when mainline Protestantism was still culturally ascendant nationally, and in my regional context when a more moderate instantiation of the Southern Baptist Convention still prevailed, Baptist parents who wanted their children to have a Christian higher education encouraged their children to attend institutions like Gardner-Webb. An institution like the one in the state to our north that recently encouraged its students to obtain concealed handgun permits and bused 300 students to Washington, D.C. to support a beleaguered Supreme Court nominee once would have been considered appropriate for the progeny of folk out on the fringes, but not for the kids of respectable Baptist parents. Now parents in our region who want a Christian higher education for their children think first of the institution I did not name, while more progressive Baptist parents increasingly tend to send their kids to state universities and non-church-related private universities rather than a place like Gardner-Webb. The cultural mainstreaming of fundamentalism has left institutions like Gardner-Webb occupying a disappearing niche in higher education.

A NOT-UNRELATED CHALLENGE HAS TO DO with increasingly negative perceptions of Christianity in American society. One segment of the American church is saddled with its overwhelming support for a president whose policies and character contradict core Christian commitments, and another segment of the American church is coping with an ever-more-horrifying clergy sex abuse scandal—a scandal that overshadows similar but lower-profile scandals in other ecclesial communions, including my own. (I have no desire to recover some bygone cultural establishment of Christianity as the cure for what ails Christian higher education. We're experiencing the sharpening of the cultural disestablishment of Christianity that Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon addressed back in 1989 in their book Resident Aliens. Along with Hauerwas and Willimon, I welcome cultural disestablishment as an opportunity for the church to become a more fully Christian countercultural community.) The Christian identity of our institutions needs some serious reconstruction. We cannot take up this task unless we do so together, ecumenically—within our institutions as places of receptive ecumenical encounter, and in ecumenical cooperation with one another’s institutions. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a former member of the World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order, once declared that “apartheid is too strong for the divided churches.” So are these challenges facing Christian higher education.

A recent book by fellow Baptist theologian Elizabeth Newman points to the necessity of receptive ecumenism for the renewal of Christian higher education. Divine Abundance: Leisure, the Basis of Academic Culture (Cascade Books, 2018) alludes in its subtitle to Josef Pieper’s 1948 book Leisure, the Basis of Culture. If you are familiar
with the latter book, you know that neither Pieper nor Newman are calling for us simply to have more spare time for thinking great thoughts. I call attention to an ecumenical application that she makes toward the end of the book’s final chapter:

Division in the church...has contributed to the disengaged academy. Stated differently, a crisis in friendship...has made it more difficult for the academy to see how leisure is the basis of its culture. This reality suggests that recovering ecclesial friendship is crucial for a renewal of academic leisure.5

Newman draws on Brad Gregory’s work in *The Unintended Reformation* to show how Catholic and Protestant theologians turned to anti-Protestant and anti-Catholic polemics that separated theology from the rest of the university disciplines in their quest for knowledge and made theology relevant only insofar as it was useful for something like refuting the arguments of one’s opponents. She echoes James Burtchaell in insisting that “academic renewal calls for an ecumenical effort by discovering how healing elements within different traditions might renew the whole.” She continues,

Such renewal is not only about discovering elements in another communion and taking them as incentives for self-renewal; it is also more fully about being open to being drawn into communion with others through Divine Wisdom even in the midst of brokenness....And the renewal of leisure strengthens friendship by rooting it more fully in a shared reception of the gifts that God desires to give and that are, in a sense, already present....If love and knowledge reciprocally nourish one another...then friendship across ecclesial division becomes a key way of realizing divine abundance in the academy and moving toward leisure as its true basis.6

What Newman is writing about is robust and receptive ecumenism, which can enable us to receive from the different traditions resources we need for reconstructing Christian identity in Christian higher education.

Neither the visible unity of the church nor the renewal of Christian higher education is an end in itself. They participate in the bigger thing that God is doing from creation through consummation. This is the final paragraph in *Divine Abundance*:

Rightly understood, the challenge today is not how to get God back into the academy. It is rather how to become persons capable of seeking and listening to God in all places. This would be an impossible task if it were not for the gift of friendship, most fully the Friendship of God. Such Divine Friendship...identifies how God, the source of all that is, desires communion with all of creation. It is only in light of this cosmic logic that leisure as the basis of academic culture makes sense. Such Divine Abundance opens the academy up to a Mystery so rich, so illuminating, and so profound that it exceeds human understanding even as it is the beginning of wisdom.7

I hope that continued reflection on our conference theme “Robust and Receptive Ecumenism” will help us receive the gift of ecclesial friendship, sourced in the Friendship of God, that our institutions might participate in God’s goal of drawing all creation into communion with God.8

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THEODICY WITH PLASTIC PLANTS

It seems to require a lot of dead fish to settle on a pH. It seems to require a lot of dead fish to make tap water mimic the tropics in viable ways.

It seems to require many trips to Walmart to buy baggie after baggie of them along with paper-thin food to cast like pond scum above their heads.

It seems to require only these 24 rosy letters in my red-letter Authorized Version for Christ to float the metaphor that haunts this project: 

_I will make you fishers of men._

It seems to require hundreds of billions of dead fish for him to prepare a place for us where the elements will sustain life without end. And it seems apropos to lament each dead fish as we mourned the exquisite one we were obliged to scoop out yesterday, the one you had named _Sunburst_, the one everyone pointed to first.

(For Debbie)

Bill Stadick
Except for potato chips, my mother never bought anything at the grocery store that wasn't on sale.

One week she'd come home with six boxes of Kellogg's Corn Flakes and four boxes of elbow macaroni, all but one of each stashed together on the shelf in the hallway guest closet. Butter, milk, and cheese came to our refrigerator in marked-down oversized packages and cartons. The meat for our dinners was determined by ten cents off a pound of pork chops, five cents off hamburger, fifteen cents off cube steak or frozen fish.

She clipped every newspaper coupon for staples. Our toilet paper varied from sale to sale, twenty-four rolls of Charmin nearly smothering eight bars of Ivory soap beside a pile of threadbare towels in the bathroom closet. And downstairs, in the damp root cellar beneath our front porch, were shelves arranged by sales on canned peaches, apricots, grapefruit sections, tuna, French cut green beans, and creamed corn. One can of Dole pineapple sections, the remnant of an earlier eight-can binge, would sit forlornly beside six bright new cans of A&P house brand pineapple.

But there was only one brand of potato chips that satisfied my mother—Quinlan's—and I was as glad for that as I was unhappy to learn it was Puffed Rice and not Cocoa Puffs that was on sale when she set down a bag full of five discounted boxes.

Before I turned ten, she occasionally tested Wise, Bachman's, and Lay's, deciding that there were too many dark ones (Wise), too many broken pieces (Bachman's) or too many that lacked sufficient salt (Lay's). When she rejected all of them "once and for all," I was happy because I loved Quinlan's as much as she did. They were thin and light and wonderfully greasy, deep fried in palm oil years before anyone but people my mother called "the fussy" worried about cholesterol. Above all, they were so heavily salted that after a few minutes of gorging, I could feel my lips puckering into ridges I'd have to lick in order to keep them from cracking.
If all the problematic ingredients, trans fat included, were printed on those bags, we didn't read them. Of course my mother admitted that potato chips weren't good for anybody, but this tiny luxury was such a pleasure, and she seldom humored herself in any other way, that she claimed it wouldn't hurt to have one little sin. For my mother, chips were like cigarettes, something to indulge in no matter their long-term consequences, all of which were uncertain. After all, she said, there were plenty of healthy looking eighty-year-old smokers around, weren't there?

When my homework was done, my mother and I would open a fresh twenty-ounce bag and sit by side on the couch to watch dramas on television, most often the plays that were on Studio One. The shows were live, something she thought was special even though the original scripts often ended with my mother saying, "I don't get it, Gary. Did you get it?" because the stories finished with at least a bit of ambivalence.

If we missed Studio One, my mother busy with housework or exhausted from working in my father's bakery, we had chips to eat while we watched quiz shows like $64,000 Question or Twenty-One, answering just enough of the easy questions to make us believe we could win the big prize if we studied up.

Those shows were just getting started when my father left for work. My sister, even though she was older, went to bed at ten o'clock because she didn't want to stay up late to waste her time with television. "You can catch up tomorrow night," my mother would say to me, tearing open a brand-new bag or taking the clip off a half-eaten one. In fact, my father and my sister didn't even eat potato chips, content as they were with the marked-down Macintosh apples and seed-infested, stringy tangerines that seemed to be perpetually on sale. Good. I didn't mind sharing the ice cream that arrived in two-gallon cartons, which didn't fit in the upstairs refrigerator freezer and only came in chocolate or vanilla. I didn't care if my sister drank more than I did from the fourth consecutive family-size can of Hawaiian Punch.

But I was happy that my mother hoarded those chips, stuffing the half-eaten bags behind empty casserole dishes or inside the baking pan that was only used for Thanksgiving turkeys or Easter hams. I sometimes had to spend fifteen minutes trying to find the bag, and I'd have to memorize exactly how it was placed and how tightly rolled up it was before I took the largest handful I could without making a detectable difference. There was never a bag so nearly empty I couldn't take some. If my mother and I were that close to the bottom, we'd finish them and lick our fingers to add one last delight before she threw away the package.

My mother admitted that potato chips weren't good for anybody, but this tiny luxury was such a pleasure, and she seldom humored herself in any other way, that she claimed it wouldn't hurt to have one little sin.

Even as we stuffed ourselves, my mother told me we were eating in moderation. There was even denial because we could eat only one bag per week. Shopping was done on Wednesdays, as measured and regular as other household chores—laundry (Monday), ironing (Tuesday) house cleaning (Thursday). We always had to make do until the following Wednesday, and that routine made us feel, for one hour, two nights a week, as if we were celebrating salt-filled holidays.

But soon we had the bag emptied by Friday night because the year I turned thirteen we started watching The Untouchables on Thursday night and The Twilight Zone on Friday. My mother thought Robert Stack was rugged and handsome, and even if there was no end of criminals for Eliot Ness to bring to justice, she always knew how things turned out. Likewise for The Twilight Zone, which delighted her by pulling a surprise near the end, but one that wasn't confusing.

The problem was how far from the next Wednesday we were without any chips in the house. She wasn't going to buy a second bag. Not ever. If we wanted to have chips for Peter Gunn or Mr. Lucky—private detective shows she said she
watched because, as she would tell me, “You love them so much”—she was going to have to make them herself. She already owned a deep fryer that she used for chicken and breaded shrimp, and now she purchased a vegetable slicer that turned a potato into a wonderful plate of incredibly thin slices. She dropped those potatoes into the bubbling grease, and we stayed in the kitchen while they cooked, the room smelling like the kitchens of restaurants my father called “greasy spoons.”

When the doctor took her blood pressure, he was so alarmed by the numbers that he had her admitted to a hospital. A stroke, he said, was imminent. It was a miracle she was still on her feet.

My mother watched the stove partly because there was a chance all that hot grease would ignite, but mostly to make sure she got the potatoes just right. A light tan, just enough to turn them crisp and no more. “As good as Quinlan’s,” she would say, laying them out to drain on old newspaper like she did with bacon strips on Sundays, and then she’d shake salt onto them until they were coated. There’d be enough for a bowl full, fewer than we’d eat from a bag, but they were so rich and salty we didn’t care. Peter Gunn only lasted for half an hour, so there was hardly any time to finish the chips before the plot wrapped up. And having them every third week—another self-imposed schedule she honored—meant we could imagine self-discipline even as we managed to add an extra night of chips more than once a month.

When I was sixteen, my mother went for a physical because Pennsylvania had a new law that required one for driver’s license renewal. She’d been suffering from headaches for years, and when the doctor took her blood pressure, he was so alarmed by the numbers that he had her admitted to a hospital. A stroke, he said, was imminent. It was a miracle she was still on her feet.

Her hospital stay lasted two days. Once the prescribed medicine kicked in, her blood pressure fell to the ordinary range of high and they released her. She joked about her “scores” with friends so they could marvel, and before too long she was down to high/normal. The biggest challenge was on the top of the list of dietary commandments: “No salt.”

Dinners were easy. The rest of us could add salt while my mother watched. She seldom bought processed food, and she made her own soup. But now there were no chips in the grocery bag with six boxes of Farina that I would add chocolate syrup to in order to gag down during the second straight month of eating it for breakfast.

For weeks, I checked all of her hiding places, and each one stayed empty. The deep fryer stood spotless and forlorn. By the second month I bought my own bag of Quinlan’s. I had a driver’s license by then. I worked from 10:30 to 5:30 on Friday nights in my father’s bakery for $1.25 an hour, and I could afford to indulge myself.

By the second month I smuggled potato chips into the house and kept them in my room. By now I’d given up watching television, and I ate them while I listened to rock music for hours on my tiny clock radio. This happened three or four times, because shortly thereafter my mother brought home a bag of chips with the groceries. “For you,” she said, because I know how much you love them.”

“I’ll just have a few,” she said. “Doctor’s orders.”

They weren’t hidden anymore. Held together by plastic clips, the opened bags sat on a shelf beside whatever cereal was stockpiled. I stuffed myself on Wednesday nights when my mother was out of the house for choir practice, and I didn’t complain when I could tell she’d snuck a few.

And so it went until I went off to college. She waited for my vacations to bring home a bag. She didn’t say anything about her blood pressure, and I could tell, when I tasted dinner, that the food was already salted. But by the end of my sophomore year in college my father had closed the bakery, in part because of declining business, but also because my mother wasn’t able to stand on her feet all day to sell what he baked.
When I was married and bought my own chips, no longer loyal to Quinlan's, my mother would sit in my kitchen to talk, reaching inside the bag I had from time to time, always saying “Just a few.” I never heard my father object, and when I began to buy new brands that were rippled or kettle cooked, she never commented except once, when she said, “I think Quinlan’s might be out of business.”

When I visited her house there were always chips. “I knew you were coming,” she’d say. There were a variety of brands now, all of them on sale, the price marked down with a sticker on the bag, but she said she still only bought them one at a time. She was taking four kinds of medicine for her blood pressure and her heart. As always, before my father carved the Thanksgiving turkey, she picked the salted skin off one side and handed part of it to me before she devoured the rest. “It’s almost as good as chips,” she said, and I agreed, coming back into the kitchen during dinner to pick off whatever crispy strips of skin remained.

When, in her fifties, she was out of breath from modest exercise and, in her sixties, out of breath from walking to the mailbox and back, she kept eating chips because “why stop now?” Twenty-five years younger, I was already slowing down. Before my fortieth birthday, I made myself begin to wait two weeks between bags of chips. I stopped automatically salting food. It seemed healthy to only buy two bags of chips a month and to only eat deep fried food at restaurants.

My mother never had the stroke that once seemed imminent, but she did have congestive heart failure. When her organs began to shut down for good, her kidneys were the first to go. A few days before she died in her sleep at home, she wrote me a letter and had my father walk it out to the mailbox for delivery. Near its end she wrote, “I’ve never felt so nauseous”—a sentence I read after I returned from her funeral, because that letter arrived two days after she died.

And now? Twenty years later I compare brands of potato chips for the percentage of fat per serving. For the past five years I’ve refused the kinds that contain trans fat and have given up my favorite brand for one that seems less dangerous. And I exercise regularly, believing in the penance of sweating profusely four times per week.

Like a man who limits himself to five cigarettes a day as a way of minimizing his chances for serious illness, I’ve stuck to my diet of one bag every two weeks.

With exceptions.

For those, I use my mother’s excuse of thrift. This week there are two bags of chips on the kitchen counter because the sale was “Buy one, get one free.” “Forty percent less fat than regular chips,” the bag says, rationalizing those two bags into the fat-equivalent of one for me. The day I bought them I emptied half a bag with a turkey sandwich—no mayo, no oil—rationalizing again.

Except for those television shows accompanied by potato chips, I never sat with my mother to be entertained. Such behavior was the same as “doing nothing,” and when those few shows were over and the potato chips gone, there was work to be done. My mother was quick to criticize the laziness of others, mine so much included that I was embarrassed to be caught watching television at other times by myself.

None of my three children seem to crave potato chips, so I don’t have my mother’s excuse of buying for their visits. Instead, they buy chips for me when I visit, and by now I understand that they want me to indulge myself because it somehow softens my workaholic nature. When I feed my face in their living rooms and on their decks, it’s easy to remember that my mother was at her warmest when she gave in to the small pleasure of potato chips. And there’s always the self-satisfaction of pushing the bag away at last, showing that I can make myself stop while I lick my fingers one at a time, relishing the joy of salt and grease.

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Betty LaDuke's Great Gifts

John Ruff

The first time my friend Dolores "Dee" Fitzpatrick laid eyes on a painting by Betty LaDuke, she wept. This happened a year ago in the main corridor of the College of Arts and Sciences Building at Valparaiso University. Gloria Ruff and Gregg Hertzlieb of Valparaiso's Brauer Museum of Art were unpacking the first of twenty-one large-scale, boldly colored acrylic paintings that LaDuke had donated. At the time, of all the university's classroom buildings, the College of Arts and Sciences Building was the newest, the best lit, and the most unadorned.

It was spring break, and the building was empty but for a few faculty members working in their offices, plus Luci Hicks, Yvonne Hale, and Catherine Busch, staff members from the dean's office. Carol Goss, who directs the Language Learning Center down the hall, must have noticed what was happening through the big picture windows that look out on the corridor. She joined others who had begun to congregate there as Hertzlieb and Ruff worked, and Goss snapped three photos with her cell phone to record the event. These photos show five paintings: one on a rack, two leaning against a wall, and the diptych, *Africa: Osun Procession, 1997* already installed. Yvonne Hale appears in one of the photos taking a photo of her own. Dee Fitzpatrick does not appear, though Goss and Busch both recall that Dee was there and that she cried.

When I first met Fitzpatrick, she was working the 4:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. shift as a custodian in the Arts and Sciences Building. I would see her when I arrived around 7:00 a.m. to prepare to teach my 8:00 class on writing in the health professions. One day early in the fall semester, I introduced myself and told Dee what I was there to teach. In the brief conversation that followed, she informed me that her job as a university custodian covered her daughter's tuition, which was great, but her
Betty LaDuke was born Betty Bernstein in the Bronx, New York City, in 1933. From an early age she prepared herself to be an artist, first at the High School of Music and Art in New York City, then on scholarship at Denver University, then at the Cleveland Institute of Art. From 1953 to 1956, while attending the Instituto Allende in Mexico, she lived with the Otomi, an indigenous people whose influence upon LaDuke was profound and


passion was providing home health care as a certified nursing assistant, her second job. She spoke with such passion about her passion that I asked if she would talk to my students sometime. She said she was afraid she'd cry because she gets so worked up, but I asked her to come anyway, and she did.

If I were fictionalizing for dramatic effect, I'd write that she pulled up outside the classroom on her floor washer, but she just walked over. I introduced her, and she spoke to my students about her work, about taking care of people in their homes, feeding them, bathing them, making sure they were taking their medications—every patient a different story. Some got better, others did not. She told it like it is. My students were spellbound, and yes, she cried.

All of which is to describe how humbly, how without pomp and ceremony or even public acknowledgment, but blessed by a working woman's tears of joy and a welcoming committee of other hardworking women, LaDuke's great paintings arrived and were received.
enduring. At some point, she studied under two African American artists crucial to her development, Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White. She completed a master's degree in printmaking and acquired teaching certification at California State University, Los Angeles in 1963. From 1964 until 1996 she taught art at Southern Oregon University.

LaDuke noticed great light and many bare walls but not much color. She told her former student she was going to do something about that.

Since 1972, LaDuke has traveled the world, always with a sketchbook, and has become internationally renowned for murals, large acrylic paintings, and sketches that record those travels. She has taught, published books, and made films and videos about women artists from developing nations she has encountered, encouraged, and exhibited with. Her artworks are featured in public and private collections across the country. Works by LaDuke appear on permanent exhibition at the Portland (Oregon) International Airport and at the Rogue Valley International Airport in Medford, Oregon. Versions of her Dreaming Cows project have been installed at the Heifer Project's international headquarters in Little Rock, Arkansas, and at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon. Other permanent public installations of LaDuke's art can be visited in Ashland and Coos Bay, Oregon; Waterloo, Iowa; Greensboro, North Carolina; and now, happily, at Valparaiso University.

LaDuke’s art has been featured twice previously in exhibitions at Valparaiso University. In 2010, LaDuke loaned twenty-one large paintings that appeared as part of Valparaiso University’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration that year. The loan was arranged by her former printmaking student, Gloria Ruff, then co-chair of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Planning Committee, and currently associate curator and registrar of the Brauer Museum of Art. In 2011, LaDuke made her first gift to Valparaiso University, a large triptych, painted in acrylic, entitled Africa: Eritrea, Coptic Altar I, II, and III. In 2012, she donated to the Brauer twenty etchings done between 1963 and 1994. In 2016 the Brauer Museum hosted a major exhibit of LaDuke’s work entitled “Celebrating Life: Betty LaDuke Retrospective.” It was while Ruff was giving LaDuke a tour of the campus—they were, in fact, in the College of Arts and Sciences Building at the time—that LaDuke wondered if for some reason Valparaiso University had an aversion to color. She noticed great light and many bare walls but not much color. She told her former student she was going to do something about that.

In the fall of 2016, Ruff traveled to Ashland, Oregon, and visited with LaDuke in her studio. Not long after, LaDuke donated twenty-one large canvases and eighteen smaller works to the Brauer, including paintings, etchings, and drawings. Her hope was that they would be installed in public spaces around campus.

As I write, seventeen of LaDuke’s works adorn the main corridors and entryway of the College of Arts of Sciences and the entryway to Christ College in Mueller Hall. They depict scenes from around the world, from Central and South America, India, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. They feature members of indigenous peoples from across the globe, people whom LaDuke has sketched, photographed, lived with, and studied. The paintings LaDuke gave us, all large canvases done in acrylics, represent her best work. They include men but feature more women, often at work, usually with their children and the animals they depend on, wild and domesticated. The images are visionary, mythic, and magical.

LaDuke’s artist statement, right there besides the wall text that includes her biography, begins with the question, “What unites the body of work?” Her answer is better than any I could provide:

What pulls us all together is the need to survive. How we coexist depends upon basic components—tilling the earth, forming communities, celebrating the transaction of seasons and rites of passage.
from birth to death. I yearn for peace in a world where life can blossom and where creative potential allows for "constructing" rather than "deconstructing" as the primary force. My sketches, prints, acrylic paintings, and shaped wood panels often embrace the following themes: spiritual traditions that connect us to our past, present, and future; honoring the earth—plowing, planting, and harvesting; peace that brings an end to conflict and war; and transitions that recognize our life cycle from birth to bonding to ultimately letting go.

Consider how this statement helps us better see and understand LaDuke's *Mexico: Easter Journey, 1978*. The curators placed this painting just inside the main entrance of the College of Arts and Sciences Building, on the wall closest to the dean's suite of offices, opposite the only decorative element to precede the LaDuke painting onto the walls: the university motto in large capital letters, painted in light beige upon a slightly darker beige wall: "IN LUCE TUA VIDEMUS LUCEM." The Latin phrase means, in English, "In Thy Light We See Light." The verse comes from Psalm 36:9. If you step outside the door opposite the inscription, you will see that

same Latin verse on the middle of a large metal screen, surrounded by translations of that sentence or parts thereof—particularly the word “light”—in forty-three languages. No decorative feature of any building on campus better embodies Valparaiso University’s commitment to cultural diversity and global education than that screen.

Back inside, that commitment is affirmed in yet another language, this one visual, or visionary, that LaDuke developed for herself through almost seventy years of studying, teaching, and making art. Even without LaDuke’s title, the ochre-colored cross is a clear signal this scene connects to the Christian story of the Passion, though not conventionally. Two human figures, a woman and a man, appear to embrace the cross. Gloria Feman Orenstein, author of Multi-Cultural Celebrations: The Paintings of Betty LaDuke (Pomegranate, 1993), identifies them as “the Virgin and Christ.” If so, Mary wears a bright green dress instead of the traditional blue one, decorated, as is her reddish auburn hair, with brightly colored flowers. Christ, the male figure opposite her, according to Orenstein, wears a plain cobalt colored robe, stands in a flock of birds, and has three heads—two human and one the head of a dog or wolf or coyote, perhaps some manifestation of an indigenous trickster figure.

Together they express a wholly different trinitarian presence than we encounter in traditional Christian iconography. Three stars appear to reinforce the trinitarian theme, and a green and yellow crescent shape suggests the moon. Images
of the Virgin of Guadalupe always show her standing upon a crescent moon, so that element, along with all the flowers and birds, synthesizes indigenous Aztec and traditional Christian symbolism. I haven’t mentioned the bodiless head that hovers above the woman. Neither can I account for him. Orenstein claims “the Virgin and Christ, female and male, transform the cross of crucifixion into a spiritual crossroad.” She claims “it is at a point of intersection of the horizontal and the vertical, the material and the spiritual, that miracles can occur.” She suggests the stars and birds in LaDuke’s work “remind us that all earthly things are also spiritual, and that we too come from the stars.”

In “An Artist’s Journey from Oregon to Timbuktu,” an essay LaDuke wrote about her work for an anthology edited by Susan R. Ressler entitled Women Artists of the American West (McFarland & Company, 2010), LaDuke recounts the origin of Mexico, Easter Journey, 1978. “Mexico,” she writes, “is like a mother that always beckons me home.” She continues:

Through the years I kept returning, to the see the changes in San Miguel, Guanajuato, and the Otomi Indian villages where I have painted murals. I also visited Oaxaca, now the home of my first art teacher, Elizabeth Catlett, to interview her for my book, Women Artists: Multi-Cultural Visions. I also attended the week-long celebration of Easter in the villages surrounding Oaxaca and created many sketches of these seasonal rituals.”

She goes on to describe how “El encuentro,” or “the meeting,” inspired Mexico, Easter Journey, 1978:

On Easter Sunday, statues of Christ and the Virgin Mary, dressed in splendid velvet robes, are elevated on wooden platforms and carried out of the church into the sunlight. They are carried in opposite directions around the church, accompanied by processions of mothers, fathers, and children, singing and then praying at each of the cardinal directions until they meet again and re-enter the church. Christ and the Virgin represent a spiritual crossroad between heaven and earth, good and evil. Local farmers also bring their seedlings of corn, chilis, and frijoles to receive the Virgin’s blessing.

In other words, this image of Easter is also an image of the earth’s fertility and capacity for regeneration. It celebrates a sacred local cultural practice and those who keep it alive in a meaningful and reverent way. It came to us as a gift, like life itself.

In the fall of 2019, the Brauer Museum of Art will host another exhibit of Betty LaDuke’s art, this time featuring works that address issues of social justice. The Brauer’s programming includes a campus talk by LaDuke. At that time, Valparaiso University will have a golden opportunity to honor Betty and her gift, to properly bless what is already a beautiful blessing.

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AND LIGHTED THE LITTLE O THE EARTH*

The half moon is east of Jove, a planet dot
above our act that shines the recent past
of light our star has sent as fast as thought
across vast space and back, the time our cast
will play these scenes and be, in all these words,
yet older still, four hundred years and time,
when light left the Pleiades and folk first heard
the joy, the dirge of Cleopatra's rhyme,
Antony's fall, and all is more than light
that constant one dimension—Yes—we breathe
together, move limbs and stride, move lips, our guide
begins in text and grows, this Shakespeare seed
become a life in us, ephemeral show
of light and time, and we the folio.

Marcus Goodyear

[*or “On realizing that our Shakespeare in the Park production of Antony and Cleopatra takes ninety-seven minutes, which is the same amount of time light takes to travel from the sun to Jupiter and reflect back to Earth.”]
Minor Prophets
Alan Jacobs’s The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis
Thomas Albert Howard

With good reason Germans refer to 1945 as “Year Zero” (Stunde Null), a year that saw civilization, Jonah-like, spat up from deep darkness. Once elegant cities lay in ruins, millions had perished in the war, displaced persons scavenged for food, knowledge of the Holocaust came into focus. It was a time of desolation, of soul-searching, of rethinking pretty much everything.

Two years earlier, in 1943, the Allied powers felt that victory lay in reach even if much work also lay ahead. Experts and analysts, statesmen and scholars began seriously asking how ought one to prepare—economically, politically, socially—for the immense challenges of the postwar world?

The five *dramatis personae*—C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot, Jacques Maritain, Simone Weil, W. H. Auden—in Alan Jacobs’s latest engaging book offered little with respect to specific political or economic prescriptions. But that’s only if one defines these terms narrowly. If one sees politics and economics as expressions of society’s deeper cultural and moral assumptions, they had much to say. The tragedy of the postwar world, in Jacobs’s interpretation, is that they amounted to minor prophets: loquacious but diminutive Cassandras drowned out in the technocratic, GDP-chasing, statist, and consumerist realities of the early Cold War and which, alas, continue to the present.

Recognizing manifold differences among his principals’ outlooks and acknowledging that their thought was in no way coordinated, Jacobs nonetheless believes that they shared a common cause in championing Christian humanism, an intellectually rich set of ideas and sensibilities about the dignity and capacities of the human person that traces its roots to the Renaissance and ultimately back to classical philosophy and biblical revelation. Steeped in these traditions, Lewis, Eliot, et al. felt that the “world had gone astray” and circa 1943 began asking: “If the free societies of the West win this great war, how might their young people be educated in a way that made them worthy of the victory—and that made another war...at worst avoidable and at best unthinkable?” (xiv-xv).

Education lay at the core of their vision. For civilization to prosper in more than in strictly material terms, educators needed to return to first principles, ask fundamental questions, beginning with *quid sit homo*? What is man? What is human nature? As Maritain put it in his *Education at the Crossroads*: “[Education] cannot escape the problems and entanglements of philosophy, for it supposes by its very nature a philosophy of man, and from the outset it is obliged to answer the question: ‘What is man?’ which the philosophical sphinx is asking” (123).

For Maritain, right thinking about this
question points to theological anthropology, a recognition that all human beings are created in the image of God and are obliged to honor this reality in themselves and in others. As Jacobs engages Maritain:

It is against the animal and numerical modes of accounting for human beings—two ways of “losing all human sense”—that Maritain wants to resist by grounding education in a commitment to personalism. “To say that a man [Jacobs here quoting Maritain] is a person is to say that in the depth of his being he is more whole than a part and more independent than servile. It is this mystery of our nature which religious thought designates when it says that the person is the image of God” (125).

The others whom Jacobs treats shared Maritain’s assumption, and all five would resonate with John Milton’s famous statement on the purpose of learning in his 1644 essay, “Of Education,” which Jacobs quotes: “The true end of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection” (50). If this sounds mawkish and antiquated to our ears, it would serve as evidence to these thinkers that the barbarians had long overrun the gate.

Jacobs’s principals were perhaps even more unified in what they saw themselves arguing against, which included a) a highly specialized, just-the-facts approach to education as championed by “positivists” in the academy; b) an individualism averse to normative judgments as championed by an assortment of liberals and libertarians; and c) what today we might call STEM reductionism, a commitment to science and technology at the expense of all else, as championed by industry and military establishments.

For each, humanism without God was an especially dangerous path. For without some sense of transcendence to circumscribe human ambition and inspire the better angels of our nature, society might head toward what Lewis diagnosed in The Abolition of Man (1943): a world that boasted of the human conquest of nature when in fact something quite different was the case, as Lewis spells out: “What we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument” (134). Avoiding this fate requires what Lewis famously designated as the Tao, recognition that morality cannot be seen as a malleable “social convention,” a set of irrational taboos wholly dependent on subjective caprice and the whims of time and place. Though undetectable by microscope or stethoscope, it is rather the most real part of our distinctly human reality and must be respected as such. Without God and the Tao, education readily devolves into the “training of [a human] animal for the utility of the state” (124). The historical record of twentieth-century totalitarianism amply bears out the validity of this concern.

Jacobs admires but does not pedestalize, recognizing that prophets often come with clay feet. With “terrifyingly intense earnestness” and a “strenuous theology,” for instance, Weil never fathomed how God might “graciously reveal himself to someone who has not fully earned that revelation” (110-11). Eliot, Jacobs contends, sometimes drew less from Christian sources than from “a kind of conservatism that was even then archaic” (153) And if you have struggled with Eliot’s prose, Jacobs sympathizes: “What makes Eliot’s prose so distinctively bad is the way it joins an insistence upon the most peculiarly minute distinctions with an inclination toward the most impenetrable abstractions” (180).
in addition to influencing the United Nations's Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), left his mark in contemporary philosophy, even if he is known today mainly by those interested in "personalism" or in Maritain's towering, medieval mentor, Thomas Aquinas.

Admittedly, all this might not add up to much in light of the technocratic juggernaut and servitude to Mammon and Leviathan that these thinkers saw themselves battling against. But it's not nothing.

I might also quibble with one highly relevant thinker that Jacobs left out: the Thomist philosopher Josef Pieper. He would have made a nice German companion to the French, American, English fivesome. In particular, Pieper's Leisure, the Basis of Culture, albeit published just after the war, was a masterful apologia for a type of Christian humanism and liberal education that shares much in common with the works of those treated and, at least in some circles, has enjoyed considerable influence.

Like all serious moral engagements with the past, Jacobs's The Year of Our Lord is as much about our own age as it is about the 1940s. If you feel that the world remains astray—or if "astray" for you in fact characterizes the permanent state of things—Jacobs's book will provide, at a minimum, some consolation and, at a maximum, a provocative blueprint for educating toward a post-astray world. 

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**Submission Guidelines**

**What We Publish:** The Cresset publishes essays, reviews, and poetry, not fiction. Essays that we publish are not generally opinion pieces but expository, personal, or exploratory essays. We will, on occasion, consider interviews or selected other genres. Almost any subject is possible. We are highly selective about personal essays of faith experience and about homilies. The editor reviews all manuscripts and, when necessary, solicits opinions from members of an Editorial Board, consisting of faculty members at Valparaiso University.

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1. Our readership is educated, most with some church connection, most frequently Lutheran. Articles should be aimed at general readers interested in religious matters.

2. *The Cresset* is not a theological journal, but a journal addressing matters of import to those with some degree of theological interest and commitment. Authors are encouraged to reflect upon the religious implications of their subject.

3. Style is governed, in most cases, by *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

4. We do accept unsolicited manuscripts; however, before submitting a manuscript, you may want to contact the editor at cresset@valpo.edu about the suitability of your topic. Our review columns (film, popular culture, music, and so forth) are usually supplied by regular columnists.

5. Poetry, essays, and reviews may be submitted via thecresset.submittable.com/submit. Essays and reviews may also be emailed to cresset@valpo.edu. The preferred format for emailed submissions is Microsoft Word.

6. The use of notes is discouraged. Notes of supporting citations should be placed in parentheses in the text, listing author last name, year of publication, and page numbers where appropriate, e.g., (Wright 1934, 232).

7. In a separate section entitled "Works Cited," list alphabetically by author (and, within author, by year of publication) all items that are cited in the text. Provide complete bibliographical information, including author's first name, publisher, and place and date of publication. Examples:


AN ODE TO 1577

The year of the Great Comet
The year Teresa of Avila wrote *El Castillo Interior, Las Moradas*
A good year for making and claiming new words for our lexicon
*Metanoia*, for instance, a nice addition to English. More
than repentance. The mind across. Total transformation.
No window dressing. A full reversal in your interior castle
The year Teresa had a vision of the soul’s crystal globe
*plunged into darkness, became as black as coal and emitted an insufferable odour, and the venomous creatures outside the palace boundaries were permitted to enter the castle*
The year recorded in the Irish *Annals of the Four Masters* when a
*wonderful star appeared in the south-east in the first month of winter: it had a curved bow-like tail, resembling bright lightning, the brilliancy of which illuminated the earth around, and the firmament above*
The year the Turkish astronomer Taqi al-Din was condemned for recording the comet’s appearance, because this begot the plague
The year the Carmelite order ordered Teresa into voluntary retirement for nattering on about institutional change-of-heart reforms
The year *deicide and ulcerous* entered our flourishing language
The year that Tycho Brahe, seeing a great comet with his own eyes, measuring it with his sextant, persisted in insisting sun, moon, and stars revolved around our gross and heavy earth
The year Teresa of Avila wrote *Never suppose that either the evil or the good that you do will remain secret, however strict may be your enclosure*

Maryanne Hannan
Lyrical Inventions

A Review of H.K. Bush’s The Hemingway Files

Edward Uehling

While he was away on sabbatical last fall, my friend Mark Schwehn sent one copy of a novel to three of his friends back home. A sealed envelope bore the warning to open it only after completing the book; the enclosed letter instructed the reader to pass it along to the next person on the list so that we could have a good discussion when he returned. After my turn, I passed it on as instructed and also recommended it to another friend. That friend was so taken with the story that he bought a copy for his brother, three more copies for friends, as well as one for their local library. It is rare and wonderful when a book generates such a sense of community.

The novel, The Hemingway Files, is the first novel by H.K. Bush, who presses into service very real literary figures to interact with an array of fictional characters. It begins with a message for the reader from (the fictional) Professor Martin Dean at Indiana University Bloomington. Dean explains that he has received four packages and letters from a favorite former student, Jack Springs (also fictional), with instructions to open them in order. Jack had completed his bachelor’s degree at IU, and afterward went on to receive a PhD in American literature at Yale and a three-year post-doctoral position in Kobe, Japan. There he comes under the influence of a renowned scholar of American literature, Professor Goto, who becomes his mentor or “sensei.”

In a separate letter to Dean, Jack’s father writes of his son’s untimely death from cancer at the age of forty-four and acknowledges that he does not know the contents of the parcels.

Our literary mystery begins with a signed first edition of The Old Man and the Sea and Jack’s self-conscious description of his farewell “letter to the world,” to borrow “sister Emily [Dickinson’s]” terms. Jack and Dean are well matched in literary tastes and, slightly less obviously, religious sensibilities. The story proper is Jack’s letter to Martin Dean, and Dean’s italicized commentary at the end of each chapter is crucial to our listening in on the “words, words, words” between life-long friends.

The epistolary framework of the novel contributes skillfully to its tone and meaning. The reader can well imagine a young scholar who, facing death, wants to find the right audience and setting to tell the truth about his adventure. And as one writer/reader to another, Jack carefully frames his tale in the opening pages. For instance, he quotes (the real) war correspondent Michael Herr, author of Dispatches: “The problem was that you didn’t always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made sense at all; it just stayed stored there in your eyes” (18).
When Jack discovers that he has only months to live, his oncologist says, "Consider this summer to be your gift. What do you want to do with it?" Jack realizes that setting things right will require help, which is why he calls on Dean. He concludes his appeal with the first of many quotes from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature" (24).

The great strength of the novel develops through the literary discussions between Jack and Goto and then the subsequent commentary by Martin Dean for us, his readers.

Martin Dean accepts the challenge of being that friend, editor, and critic with this caution for us as well as himself: "The lyrical inventions of the great artists can indeed set us free, but if we're not deliberate in our careful use and stewardship of them, their narcotic effects can imprison us as well" (26). (I'm roughly a contemporary of Dean, so I'm familiar with The Scholar Adventurers, a wonderful book by Richard Altick that charmed English graduate students of my time. As we toiled—pre-computer—at assigned bibliographic searches in the bowels of the library, we'd occasionally conjure Altick's representation of academic life as an exotic search for lost or unknown literary manuscripts. Dean would have had similar experiences to mine, which were designed to instill in us a reverence for primary texts.)

Bush, a professor of English at St. Louis University who has spent time as a senior fellow at Waseda Institute in Tokyo, draws from his personal experience of Japan to give readers nuanced understanding of the cultural conflicts that arise in the relationships Jack develops with Professor Goto and Mika, Goto's beautiful niece. Their early discussions of Japanese art and American literature are thrilling to Jack. And although he is keenly attuned to nuances of denotation and connotation, as well as to the great divide between their academic and financial circumstances, Jack's naivete is notable. For instance, as he records his first impressions of Mika: "[She] glided effortlessly into the room with another hot pot of tea...She did not look me in the eye, but she was fully there, fragrant as cut flowers in her splendid garment" (62). We notice, as Goto does, that Jack is smitten; only we are amused.

The great strength of the novel develops through the literary discussions between Jack and Goto and then the subsequent commentary by Martin Dean for us, his readers. As we listen to Goto, we learn he has broken from the easier, modern path of industrial wealth that his father and brother have followed. Goto is hardly poor, and his extravagant collection of first edition books and previously undiscovered letters represents a traditional, even old-fashioned, path, as well as a source of power. Although the title of the novel refers both to some lost Hemingway stories and Goto's meetings with Ezra Pound and Hemingway's first wife, Hadley, the most important influences on Goto, Jack, and eventually Martin Dean are Emerson and Melville and, finally, Walt Whitman.

Jack and Goto share an interest in literary letters. When Jack researches Goto's dissertation from the mid-1950s, "Transcendental Friendship in Emerson's Essays, Letters, and Life;" he is fascinated with "the idea that a friendship might become transcendental, somehow revelatory of the nature of God, or the Oversoul, and that such a friendship might be partly inspired by the writing of letters" (90). Thinking of this statement and Emerson's earlier depiction of friendship led me to recall Asher Brown Durand's famous Hudson River painting Kindred Spirits. It is not difficult to imagine Dean coming to such a moment when he realizes how he has been drawn into Jack's narrative: "In effect, Jack's story was destined to become wedded to my own story and would change my life in ways I could never have foreseen. An uncanny result, one that Jack had perhaps planned all along" (123-24).

Game on. And what a game it is. The novel's careful narration allows us to experience twists and turns as they occur. But some information
may be helpful. First, the English Department assigned Jack a guide, Miyamoto, who is sullen and somewhat threatening. We eventually discover that he was once a confidant of Goto and assisted him in small projects. He also has designs on Mika. It takes Jack a long time to understand the danger that Miyamoto represents to him. Jack enjoys the company of other new faculty, and he likes his students, although he is generally disappointed in their level of seriousness and preparation. His travels in Japan are interesting, as are his friendships—particularly that with Jim, an American friend who has temporarily joined a Buddhist monastery outside Kyoto.

But the heart of the novel is in the developing relationship between Jack and Goto and, at last, Dean's and our understanding of that relationship. A brief reference to Goto's letter from Ezra Pound exemplifies the complexity of feelings. Goto reveals documents to Jack in a carefully determined order; when he hands over the Pound letter, we sense a complicated shift in this friendship, which is now of two years duration. Jack reads the letter, "flabbergasted," and asks Goto when he expected to make the letter available to scholars.

"It is not something we need to hurry.... Every year that I withhold my secret, its value doubles, I should say!" He enjoyed his little treasure now, laughing as a child might with a new toy.

"Of course it is already unique, and thus almost impossible to appraise. What you hold in your hand may in fact be one of the most valuable single sheets of paper in American literary collecting. And you are only the fifth person to know of its existence—at least, to my knowledge. This should be a matter of some small enjoyment for you." (209)

Goto sends Jack on a luxurious vacation to Paris under the guise of courier duty (authenticating and sneaking through customs a collection of letters between Mark Twain and Joseph Twichell). When Jack expresses concern over the ethics of this transaction, Goto is so furious that they do not see each other until a year later, on the day of the famous earthquake. In his commentary at the end of this chapter, Dean observes,

It was shocking, to say the least, to realize Jack had been caught up doing the legwork for a man whose substantial literary collection had been accumulated by, perhaps, questionable means. And the recognition that an old academic, not unlike myself, can be revealed suddenly to contain twisted and even menacing traits of monomania and conceit was more than a little disconcerting. I was shocked, that is, but also entranced by a sort of self-revelation. For Goto's journey was one on which but for the grace of God, each of us might embark, if and when we become obsessed by the delights of this or that passing shadow. (238)

On January 17, 1995, Jack is awakened in his apartment by violently moving furniture, books, and appliances. Quickly, he rushes to the damaged home of his sensei, Goto, whom Jack finds pinned beneath a ceiling beam. It will be their last lesson, and before Jack escapes with an unbelievable inherited library, they will once again read from Emerson to reclaim their friendship as "a spiritual gift." The lesson ends with Jack responding to his friend's request that he read Whitman's poem "The Sleepers."

After the earthquake, Jack Springs returns to a position at an American university, where he teaches for fifteen years before the cancer appears. From Jack, Martin Dean will receive a final letter of inheritance that moves him to travel to Japan and a Buddhist monastery, symbolically enough, on Independence Day.

Whether readers are academicians or not, they will find the ending of the novel deeply engaging on the ideas of friendship and spiritual wholeness. The level of understanding Bush aims for is impressive, perhaps even inspirational. You won't want to miss it.

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POPPIES

Do you remember the July before we met? In America, our town flooded but in Scotland, the sun rose over the dovecote each morning, and the cows looked up from the grass through my window. I lived in a long, low building curving into Boarhills. A village; a farm surrounded by houses. Beyond the fallow field, the path cut between the woods and the sea. When the tides and 4 a.m. sun brought insomnia, I ran, stepped between snails balanced on blades of grass,

and thought of someone like you. In the afternoons I cycled past poppies alongside the road, red as my mountain bike, faces turned to the sun. Evenings, I walked past the overgrown row of beans and looked instead towards the empty church on the hill, backlit by a sunset at 10 p.m. This lonely, wild place

was what I dreamed of last night. Finally, you were there too, with the red poppies and cows and the coming sunrise, but someone had locked my room. All we had: hard brown carpet. You were here, and everything was wrong. But morning was coming through the 4 a.m. windows. Outside, the poppies, the dovecote. Beyond the next hill, the call of the sea.

Katie Karnehm-Esh
Quick: Which kind of shovel is best? That’s meant to be a ridiculous question. Everyday gardeners will give a different answer than landscapers, who’ll disagree with fence installers, who’ll answer differently than snow removers or stable boys. The best tool is whatever someone needs to accomplish their task. But change the question from the noble task of shoveling to that of worshiping—“What’s the best kind of worship music?”—and the answers turn more absolute. “While every generation thinks its contribution is undoubtedly worthy, some contributions are better than others,” said the eminent Lutheran composer Carl Schalk in a 2009 interview. He continued, “My guess is that many of the hymns touted today as the answer to what the church’s song ought to be will quickly fall out of use. Look at what has happened to ‘popular’ hymns from the 1960s such as ‘They’ll Know We Are Christians By Our Love...’” (Gebauer, 9). As it happens, I still lead that hymn in worship a couple times a year, to enthusiastic singing from all ages—but I also confess that wading through the leading database of 100,000 contemporary worship songs can feel like entering the Augean stables.

Worshiping isn’t shoveling. Rephrase the answer to my initial question (“It depends what you’re shoveling”), apply it to worship music (“It depends who you’re worshiping”), and people’s fraught responses make more sense. What if people who sing plainchant, hymn concertati, spirituals, or Chris Tomlin’s praise choruses are actually worshiping different gods? Less starkly, what if some kinds of worship reveal deep-seated misconceptions about who God is and how God acts? The question of “which worship music is best” starts feeling far less ridiculous.

Arguments about worship music often substitute for arguments about other, deeper things. This is just one insight from two recent books exploring how worship music works in the lives of evangelical congregations and musicians. “Differences in musical style, performance practice, and musical leadership that play out on the musical stage during worship reveal disagreements within the community that often map onto divergent political leanings,” writes Monique M. Ingalls in Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community (216). Ingalls, an ethnomusicologist at Baylor University, proposes that contemporary worship music has created five models of evangelical “congregation,” each with its own complex internal logic and conflicts. Besides the familiar church-based worship community,
she analyzes worship concerts, praise conferences like Atlanta’s annual Passion Conference, public parades and marches, and online videos. In *Shout to the Lord: Making Worship Music in Evangelical America*, Ari Y. Kelman, a professor of education and Jewish studies at Stanford, takes a different tack, interviewing musicians about their behind-the-scenes work. He finds similar conflicts. “Music is often the register for larger debates about what counts and what does not count as worship,” he writes—and these debates shape not just the songs people sing, but the theologies they live (6).

With its amplified rock bands and multi-part pop song structures, contemporary worship music is a long way from the simple Catholic folk of “They’ll Know We Are Christians.” Its appeal, though, rests on some of the same assumptions. Both Ingalls and Kelman situate praise songs in what sociomusicologist Simon Frith calls the “folk discourse”—the idea that “there is no separation of art and life” (Frith, 39). For praise musicians, projecting an air of unmediated authenticity is vital. Kelman quotes a magazine article by the worship leader Paul Baloche, who claims he’s “just singing [his] prayers,” but whose Holy Week classic “Above All” is as tightly crafted as any product of the Brill Building or Nashville’s Music Row. The article’s aw-shucks title? “Stop Trying to Write Songs.”

Following Frith, both writers convey healthy skepticism about the folk discourse and its appeals to authenticity. Witnessing a collection of global worship artists singing Tomlin’s “How Great Is Our God,” Ingalls gently mocks their performance. Whether they hail from India, Russia, or Brazil, “not only are the vocal styles of all the lead singers remarkably similar to one another, so also is the range of performative gestures, including the signature ‘worship leader grimace,’ a facial expression intended to evoke intense sincerity…” (212). Kelman details how songwriters, including Baloche, deliberately develop their craft. He suggests they cling to a facade of artlessness partly to help worshipers suspend disbelief, and partly as an escape hatch. “The folk discourse guards against suspicion that a song might be too slick to serve as worship,” he writes, “or that a songwriter might be motivated by something other than their own faith…” (60). Having heard those criticisms before, worship artists try to head them off through fervent prayer and, yes, grimacing.

No matter how sincere the grimace, everyone learns to grimace from someone else. (Singing includes a lovely anecdote about watching a teenage boy tentatively mimic the worship gestures of some older boys at a concert.) Kelman’s larger point—that cultural conventions produce any art form, no matter how desperately the art aspires to unmediated expression—partly explains the heated rhetoric and sore feelings surrounding the “worship wars” of the late ’90s, when Protestant congregations fought, and sometimes split, over worship practices. As Daniel Silliman revealed in the Lent 2019 *Cresset*, such wars existed even in the eighteenth century, when young Puritans gravitated to newly composed hymns over psalms because “the hymns spoke to and from the heart, the psalms for a tradition passed.” Criticisms of favorite hymns can feel like attacks on everything that went into making and singing them, from intelligence and musical literacy to the singers’ egos and their beliefs about God. If a piece of worship music is inferior, says our anxious subconscious, maybe the culture behind it is to blame.
The biggest impression you get from Kelman's book is that evangelical worship leaders are riddled with anxiety. Though the modern worship wars have mostly subsided, they loom in the background of *Shout*, which often reads as a defensive apology for contemporary worship leaders—look how hard they're working, how much they care, how thoroughly they've considered their responsibilities! Over and over, Kelman depicts worship leaders struggling to maintain a difficult balance. They have to be good at their work... but not too good. "The better the songs are," he writes, "the more likely they will fall short of worship because they might become too pleasurable to sing and stop people from worshipping directly to God" (4). Songwriters "approach songwriting with no small measure of reverence, understanding that their songs must not be so affecting that they fail as worship"—that congregations will start admiring the song rather than worshiping God (64). Worship bands are in a similar bind. If they play poorly, the songs will be hard to sing. On the other hand, "worship always aspires to expressions that are larger than the music itself," writes Kelman, and so, "worship leaders understand... that, in a sense, they should fail at making music in order to make space for worship" (93).

If that's what worship leaders understand, it's nonsense. No hymn has ever "fall[en] short of worship" because it was "too pleasurable to sing." From "Above All" to "Lord, Thee I Love With All My Heart," perfect hymns are hymns people love to sing. We could hardly expect them to drill their theology into people's minds if they gave less pleasure. If a hymn's language obscures God, it's a bad hymn, not one that's somehow "so affecting" it fails as worship. Like any musical genre—like any type of shovel, for that matter—contemporary worship music has unique standards of goodness and badness. Good worship bands develop grooves that propel the congregation's voices, highlight key phrases with instrumental fills, and use strategic harmonic lines to make melodies resonate. Neither book devotes much space to precise musical descriptions of what worship musicians do. *Shout* includes two such passages: a delightful vignette of a student bandleader giving his bandmates playing tips, and, in the endnotes, a sharp three-paragraph analysis of Tomlin's hymn "Holy Is the Lord." I longed for more bits like these, but Kelman has other analytical fish to fry. He charts the rise of the British band Delirious?, offering a captivating chronology of how worship music came to dominate America's Christian music industry in the '90s. (He misstates the meter of the band's biggest hit, though: "I Could Sing of Your Love Forever" is in 4/4, not "rhythmic 6/8 time.") He also links worship practice to concepts from several different fields, making good use of Antonio Gramsci's "organic intellectual" and

Good worship bands develop grooves that propel the congregation's voices, highlight key phrases with instrumental fills, and use strategic harmonic lines to make melodies resonate.

Ingalls finds actual paradoxes where worship intersects with commerce. Studying how worship singers strain to deflect audiences' adulation onto God, she delves into the recent phenomenon of hymns about "making Jesus famous" and making God an "audience of One" for the people's praises. "God becomes the celebrity, the Divine Performer," she writes, but "God is also (and sometimes simultaneously) conceived of as the Divine Audience, who sits back on the heavenly throne and listens." Whether this is a case of confused theology, or whether God simply transcends our hapless attempts at metaphor, remains an open question. Ingalls generously suggests these metaphors represent new, self-referential ways of seeing God, using "the stardom of popular music performance as a lens through which to understand the Christian virtue of humility" (63). They're spiritual descendants of Fred Pratt Green's hymn "When In Our Music God Is Glorified."
Jerome Bruner's "instructional scaffolding." *Shout* lays out the history and philosophical tensions of worship music; but if you want to know why worship musicians make specific sounds—why guitarists use so much reverb, or why everyone plays so many add9 chords—you may need to consult *Worship Leader* magazine.

As anyone who's led worship knows, not every song is good, not every liturgy works, and a crucial part of the job is identifying why.

*Singing* doesn't answer those musical questions, either, but Ingalls's case studies have other strengths. She's refreshingly willing to call out worship leaders for poor theology. In one cringe-inducing vignette from the Passion Conference, Pastor Louie Giglio encourages the assembly to "seek to bring freedom" to victims of human trafficking. To do so, he has everyone don cardboard masks bearing photographs of mostly nonwhite faces while singing Tomlin's song "God of Angel Armies." As an attempt to identify with the marginalized Other, Ingalls writes, this performance "construes the Other entirely in terms of victimhood as the traditional object of charity in need of a (white) Savior" (96). (Many of the faces wind up in the garbage.) She contrasts this with a healthier solidarity exercise at St. Louis's Urbana Conference. There, participants take to the arena floor to construct medical kits for Swaziland's HIV patients while learning a call-and-response Swazi song. In the next chapter, Ingalls focuses on St. Bartholemew's in Nashville, an "evangelical Episcopal" congregation that blends Episcopal hymnody with contemporary praise and worship songs. St. B's music minister gives examples of songs he deems "inappropriate for corporate worship... despite how popular they had become in other evangelical churches" (125). (Alas, she doesn't share those examples.) These critiques offer some welcome nuance. As anyone who's led worship knows, not every song is good, not every liturgy works, and a crucial part of the job is identifying why.

Reading over the preceding paragraphs, I hope it doesn't seem like I'm down on contemporary worship music. In fact, I love singing and leading much of it. In its thirty to fifty years of existence, depending where you start counting, this industry has produced several dozen timeless hymns, an entirely respectable batting average. (If you can name several dozen Lutheran chorales you love to sing, I'm impressed and a little concerned.) Worship music has the weird position of being loved by untold millions of adherents and disdained or dismissed by pretty much everyone else. As a pariah, it still needs justifications like Kelman's, but that doesn't mean we should let worship music off the hook. It's an industry, after all, leading merchants to the doors of the temple, so it deserves our skeptical interrogation. As both books make clear, though, dismissing this music outright is a mistake. A gift of the same God glorified by Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine Winkworth, contemporary worship music is not just an increasingly useful tool. It can open up a new dimension in the world of sound, moving us to a more profound "Alleluia!" 🙌

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**Works Cited**


My Son Speaks in Hymns

Hilary Yancey

Jesus Christ is risen today, alleluia. Our triumphant, holy day, alleluia. Who did once upon the cr-oo-ooo-ooo-oo-ssss (alleluia), suffer to redeem our lossssss, aaaaaah-le-huuuuu-iaaaaaaa!

I sing this verse of this hymn at least ten times a day. It makes my son, who is three, laugh and dance. He always commands that I hold the high note in line three and the last alleluia until he swishes his hands down through the air to signal that it's time to cut the note off. Then, when the silence rushes in to fill the space where my voice had just been, he laughs and signs “again.”

I have been around hymns my whole life. In the liturgical tradition in which I was raised, and where I am now raising my own children, I mark the seasons better by the sections of the blue 1982 hymnal than by the leaves that rarely change color here in Waco, Texas. We move from #56 (“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”) up through #102 (“Once in Royal David’s City”), and then the path arcs onward to #207, Jack’s favorite, “Jesus Christ Is Risen Today.” The hymns carve out a path to walk, a way to measure myself against something stable. How many times have I sung these hymns, all the while becoming someone new, someone who—I hope, I pray—looks a bit more like Jesus?

My son has some complex disabilities. That is an easily typed sentence but not one as easily explained. He was born with craniofacial microsomia, a range of conditions affecting the formation of the face and skull. The right side of Jack’s face looks different—he was born with a cleft lip and palate (now repaired), missing his right eye and his right external ear. Less obvious, but more important, he is missing a small piece of his jawbone on that right side. It pulls his mouth into the most beautiful lopsided grin and it means he can't articulate most consonants. His noises, though full of meaning for him, are hard to understand. He has some signs, but he also has some sensory processing challenges that make learning signs difficult.

In many ways I don't have an ordinary language with Jack. We spend a lot of time looking at pictures of objects and animals; we work on naming clothes and trees and leaves. Action words are coming, but more slowly.

Before my son was born I pictured myself surrounded by able-bodied children, teaching them complex lessons about Jesus from the time they were infants. I imagined they would question me about him, that they would tell strangers or friends about him, that they would practice prayers by their beds before they fell asleep. In my head these conversations were all in full sentences, familiar images, and easy-to-understand speech.

When Jack was born I lost my words, my familiar images. My own speech and prayer felt garbled and impossible for even me to understand. What brought me back were hymns. What taught me who God could be, who God was, were #56 and #102 and #207. I sang them to Jack in desperation and I sang them to him without believing and I sang them to him with so much believing my throat was clogged with it and the words came out in hiccups.

I have felt the guilt of not praying before meals, and the absence of a warbly three year-old voice at my dinner table. I have wondered what Jack knows about Jesus. His preschool-age friends and relatives can tell me a lot about characters in the Bible—what they did and said and what they were like. Jack, meanwhile, looks constantly at one page in the Jesus Storybook Bible, the one with the angel announcing to the women that “He is not here, he is risen, just as he said.”
While it might sound like I’m writing this to tell you a cute story about how my son is so great despite his disabilities, really what I mean is my God, my son knows Jesus. My God, he knows him so much better than I do.

When Jack turned three, I wasn’t sure if he would be able to go to Sunday school. I knew it would be distracting for me to be there, but I also knew he would need one-on-one help to participate. When someone offered to do this for my son, I was speechless.

All of the Sunday School teachers tell me it is good for Jack to be there. The woman who walks alongside him week by week tells me his joy is full and growing. I continue to marvel—not just because my son knows Jesus, but because I’ve underestimated how other people can be the hands and feet of Jesus for us. Jack’s helper is that for him, and Jack is that for her and his classmates.

I sang hymns to Jack in desperation and I sang them to him without believing and I sang them to him with so much believing my throat was clogged with it and the words came out in hiccups.

If it is true that Jesus “plays in ten thousand places / lovely in limbs and eyes not his,” to quote Gerard Manley Hopkins, then our churches must widen to welcome those whose bodies, whose minds, whose spirits, bring forth new and different dimensions of that Face. My son needs something different in Sunday School, yes, but more than that, he deserves a space where he is met and embraced and taught.

Church can be one of the least inclusive spaces for disabled people, and maybe especially disabled children. I’m reminded, though, of how often and how carefully Jesus stopped what he was doing to engage people with different kinds of bodies in the midst of his ministry. The woman suffering from hemorrhages in Luke 8 thinks she will just clutch a thread or two. But Jesus stops, and looks for her, wanting to hear her story. When the blind man outside Jericho calls out to the Son of David for mercy, the crowd attempts to hush him or ignore him. Jesus does not. Jesus invites him to dialogue, to have conversation, to tell the story. We are perhaps tempted to think that Jesus’s healing activities show that disabilities are intrinsically bad or unfortunate. But I think the real message here is that persons with disabilities have rich stories to tell—about their lives, their embodiment, their needs, their gifts.

Such stories ask us to do something differently. This might take time. And time is what Jesus consistently gave. Can we pause and listen to how members of our own parishes might have needs that we have forgotten or ignored? Can we imagine our buildings and classrooms as spaces inclusive of all needs, and not just those that are easy to meet? Not all kids can tell you that Jesus died on the cross for their sins. Not all kids can pray the Lord’s Prayer, and not all kids can sing “Jesus Loves Me.” Some kids can move their eyes in time to that beat, though, and some kids can giggle or dance. Some kids can sign it. Some kids can stare at the picture of the warrior of light or listen to their mom sing hymn #207. They can hear God in ways that are inaccessible to others, as if hidden behind a veil.

But we can never assume God isn’t speaking. We can never assume God is satisfied that some kids are not having a rich encounter with the risen Christ, week after week, just because their way of encounter is different.

My son speaks in hymns, in holding the icon of St. Michael, and in staring at that one page in the Jesus Storybook Bible. My son meets Jesus the Resurrected One in ways that are obvious and ways that are not, ways that are hidden and ways that, if we took the time to see them, would astonish us.

Our Sunday mornings should do the same.

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How Big Is Lake Michigan?

Daniel Silliman

I love the Indiana Dunes. I love Lake Michigan. When I think of sacred space, I think of the way that water feels endless: it rolls in. And out again. And it holds me. It is as big as God’s grace. I say that like it’s a metaphor, but in my heart it’s more. There’s a way in which I understand the possibility of grace in the greatness of Lake Michigan. I wade into the water and it goes as deep as I’ll go, and deeper, and there’s always more. It’s always enough.

I was raised in a world where there was never enough. My parents were poor and made poor decisions. They had eight kids and moved around a lot, restless and searching, and basic necessities were frequently emergencies. I worked as a child to help pay for rent and groceries.

When I was fourteen, we lived in Texas, and my dad and I had work replacing insulation under mobile homes. We did it in winter, so no snakes. But it was itchy and dirty under the trailers. You had to get down and crawl. You would come up, after, looking like you’d been dead and buried, and then maybe they’d decide you weren’t dead after all, so you could come up again. It was that dirty. If we got enough of these jobs, we’d be OK, financially. But they were spread out all over central Texas, and it was hard to make enough money. We’d drive and drive, covered in dirt, driving between these jobs that were too far apart, and I’d hear my dad try to exhale all the anxiety: Ahhhhhhhhhhh.

That is the sound of the universe to me. That’s just what existence sounds like. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh. You can feel the tightness in your chest. There’s not enough. There’s never enough.

I think that’s what the slave hears in the story Jesus tells in Matthew 18:23-35. The slave doesn’t have enough money to pay what he owes the king. He doesn’t have enough time. He says, “Please. Can I have just a little more time? I can get the money. I can make it work. If only I can stretch here and do this other thing, and if that thing works out, then maybe this other thing will work, maybe, and I can just... Almost. Please.”

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

Jesus says, “The lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.” But the slave, it’s like he can’t hear over that anxiety in his ears. Because that’s the sound of everything for him. That’s the sound of the universe.

I hear that sound now when students struggle to keep up with their classes and all the other things going on in their lives.

I hear that when there are problems with the budget. Just not enough money.

I hear that here when I apply for a job teaching history, and there are two hundred other people also applying, a lot of them amazing, and there are not jobs for all of us.


But I don’t hear it at Lake Michigan. The water rolls in and out. There’s the sound of birds and people speaking different languages—Japanese, Russian, Spanish, German—and they’re all saying, “Wow. What a great lake!” The water goes on and on, like a metaphor. I get in, up to my neck. I feel safe at Lake Michigan.

Which is why I hate the Gundersons. Of all the people in Indiana: Don and Bobbie Gunderson. This is a couple who sued in state court and then appealed to the Supreme Court, saying they have the right to own the beach at Lake Michigan. They don’t want it to be public. They want it to be private. Restricted, just for them.

Who would do that? Can you imagine? Who would stand, have the audacity to stand, on the shore of a Great Lake and think, “It would be bet-
If there were just no one else here.” I just can’t imagine doing—

Oh wait, I do that. I do that all the time.

I do that when a student asks for an accommodation and my first instinct is suspicion.

I do that when I hear there are going to be budget cuts, and I hope it hits someone else.

I do that when a student asks for an accommodation and my first instinct is suspicion.

I do that when I hear there are going to be budget cuts, and I hope it hits someone else.

I do that when church or chapel isn’t how I like it to be and I think, why are there other people? Why are they here, if they don’t want to do it the right way?

In the story Jesus tells, the slave can’t hear that his own debt is forgiven. So he goes out and finds someone who owes him, like he owed the king, and demands what’s his. “The debt’s due now,” he says. “There’s no more time.” His hands are around his fellow slave’s throat, choking him. The gospel teaches me to see myself in these moments of demanding “Pay what you owe!” when my debt is forgiven. Every time I’m in a rivalry instead of solidarity, locked in antagonism instead of grace, when I can’t hear over my anxiety and I’m scared and I experience sacred space as scarcity, I am the Gundersons.

But how big is Lake Michigan?

How great is God’s love?

You can go in to your neck, and it goes deeper. Swim out. You can swim further. This is what I’m trying to do, these days. I want to crawl out from under my trailer home, filthy as the buried and unburied, and take myself to the water that waits like grace. It rolls in and out again. There’s enough. That’s enough. It can hold me. It can hold all of us.

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ON THE POETS

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